A.C.T.
The Art of Critical Thinking
“Engage the Mind, Engage the Student”
Huntingdon College’s Quality Enhancement Plan

On-site review: Oct 27-29
President: J. Cameron West
Accreditation Liaison: Dr. Cheryl Cardell
Table of Contents:

Table of Contents: ................................................................. i
I. Executive Summary: ................................................................. 1
II. Introduction: ................................................................................ 2
  II.i. Methodism and the Founding of Huntingdon College ................. 2
  II.ii. The Last 20 Years: Enrollment and Engagement ...................... 2
  II.iii. Huntingdon and the QEP: Critical Thinking and Student Engagement .......... 3
III. Huntingdon College’s QEP—The Art of Critical Thinking: .................. 4
  III.i. The Art of Critical Thinking in Three Steps ............................. 4
  III.ii. Critical Thinking and Huntingdon Students ............................ 5
  III.iii. Three Challenges that Led to the Development of our Critical Thinking QEP ....... 7
  III.iv. Timeline of the QEP’s Development ..................................... 9
  III.v. The QEP, from “Student Engagement” to “Critical Thinking” .......... 13
IV. The QEP’s First Step—the PACT Colloquium: ................................ 13
  IV.i. Why a First Year Class ....................................................... 13
  IV.ii. Huntingdon’s History of First-Year Classes ............................ 15
  IV.iii. What We Learned from these First-year Classes .................... 15
  IV.iv. Why a First-Year Class on Critical Thinking: A Focus on Empowerment .... 16
  IV.v. The PACT as the “Spine” of our Core Curriculum’s Focus on Critical Thinking ... 18
  IV.vi. Critical Thinking: The Huntingdon Faculty’s Definition ............. 19
  IV.vii. Critical Thinking: Scholarly Definitions ................................ 21
V. The Philosophy of the PACT Colloquium: ....................................... 21
  V.i. Immediate Engagement ...................................................... 21
  V.ii. Disciplined Reading and Writing .......................................... 22
  V.iii. Active Teaching .................................................................. 23
  V.iv. Adapting and Implementing the Paul-Elder Model of Critical Thinking ....... 26
VI. The PACT Colloquium: Structure ................................................. 28
  VI.i. Small Class Size .................................................................. 29
  VI.ii. Clear Focus ......................................................................... 29
  VI.iii. Units ................................................................................ 29
  VI.iv. Theme .............................................................................. 29
VII. Fall 2010: Provisional Class Structure .......................................... 30
  VII.i. Fall 2010 Unit Design: Critical Thinking in Action .................... 30
  VII.ii. Fall 2010: Potential Texts for the PACT ............................... 31
  VII.iii. Fall 2010: Potential Supplemental General Text ..................... 32
  VII.iv. Fall 2010: Potential Reading and Writing Texts ..................... 32
VIII. Institutional Capacity: ................................................................. 33
  VIII.i. Curriculum ......................................................................... 33
  VIII.ii. Funding ............................................................................ 33
IX. The Next Step of the ACT, Part 1: Integrating Critical Thinking Across the Core ... 34
X. The Next Step of the ACT, Part 2: Culminating Experiences .................. 35
XI. Assessment Plan for the ACT, Part 1: Assessing the PACT Colloquium .......... 36
  XI.i. Oversight of Assessment, Resources and Structures .................... 37
    XI.i.1. Student Learning Outcomes for the PACT Colloquium ............. 37
XI.i.2. Three Direct Measures for PACT Colloquium Assessment.......................... 38
XI.ii. Rubric Design................................................................................................. 42

XII. Assessing the Next Steps of the ACT: .............................................................. 43
    XII.i. Assessing the Distribution of Critical Thinking Across the Core .................. 43
    XII.ii. Assessing the Culminating Experience...................................................... 43

XIII. Assessment Plan Charts: .............................................................................. 45
    XIII.i. Assessing the PACT Colloquium ............................................................ 45
    XIII.ii. Assessing the Core and Culminating Experience ..................................... 46

XIV. Implementation Plan for the QEP: ................................................................. 47
    XIV.i. QEP Organizational Structure ................................................................. 47
    XIV.ii. Budget........................................................................................................ 50
    XIV.iii. Timeline.................................................................................................... 53

XV. Conclusion: The Past and Future of Huntingdon .............................................. 52

XVI. Works Cited....................................................................................................... 53
I. Executive Summary:

Huntingdon College’s Mission Statement declares “each student will study a core curriculum that develops the student’s ability to comprehend new ideas, to examine concepts critically, and to communicate clearly.” Our Quality Enhancement Plan, “The Art of Critical Thinking” (ACT), supports this goal by developing a more intentional approach to teaching critical thinking throughout the college. As educators, we agree that critical thinking is a powerful way of looking at the world. It is the process of observing subjects from an unbiased point of view, asking thoughtful, informed questions, and developing answers that are well-reasoned, well-supported, and clearly communicated. Our QEP is designed to encourage these skills, to help our students see the world beyond their received opinions, to help them engage with unfamiliar ideas, and aid them in developing thoughtful and reasoned positions on complex issues.

We plan on achieving this goal through three interrelated steps.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Three Steps of Huntingdon’s QEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) The development of the PACT Colloquium, a freshman seminar on practicing the art of critical thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) The integration of explicit critical thinking practices across the core curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) The development of culminating experiences that demonstrate high-level critical thinking skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our first step, and the primary focus of our QEP, is developing the PACT colloquium (or “Practicing the Art of Critical Thinking”), which will introduce incoming students to the skills of critical thinking from an interdisciplinary perspective. This will give all of our incoming students a shared understanding of this core intellectual value which will support their later academic success.

Our goal in the PACT Colloquium is to produce rational and fair-minded critical thinkers who can think actively, read closely, and write substantively about significant issues.

Since critical thinking cannot, and should not, be limited to the first year, the second step of our plan is that over the next two to three years we will integrate and coordination specific critical thinking skills throughout our core classes.

We also want to encourage the development of our students’ critical thinking skills beyond the core. So, the third step of our QEP is that within five years the college faculty will establish clear and unified expectations for critical thinking “culminating experiences” for all students: i.e. upper-level classes, capstones, seminars, or other senior-level projects, that include high-level critical thinking.

It is our ambition that our QEP will help our students understand, care about, and even take pride in, their education. We see critical thinking as a tool to produce this student engagement; hence our QEP’s motto, “Engage the Mind, Engage the Student.” We feel that if we are deliberate and systematic across the college in helping our students develop the tools to be better thinkers, they will feel empowered as a member of our learning community, and so take greater pride in their Huntingdon education. It all starts with a new first-year class. But that is only the foundation on which we will build our community of thinkers.
II. Introduction:

II.i. Methodism and the Founding of Huntingdon College

Originally chartered as Tuskegee Female College in 1854, Huntingdon College is now in its 155th year of operation. In 1872, the Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church assumed full management of the institution and changed the name to Alabama Conference Female College. In 1910, the Montgomery campus of the newly named Women’s College of Alabama was opened. Once the college became coeducational in 1954, the name was changed to Huntingdon College in honor of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, an influential member of the early Wesleyan movement.

Huntingdon College Mission Statement

Huntingdon College, grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition of the United Methodist Church, is committed to nurturing growth in faith, wisdom, and service and to graduating individuals prepared to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

Huntingdon has long prided itself on providing a high-quality liberal arts education at an affordable price to a wide range of students, a mission that has been in keeping with the Wesleyan vision of higher education. Since the mid-1700s, access to education for underserved and economically marginalized populations has been a priority for leaders of the Methodist movement, beginning with John Wesley’s founding of the Kingswood School in 1748, which offered a curriculum designed to instruct students “in every branch of useful learning” (Wesley, qtd. in Tyerman 9), and which was supported financially by the membership of the sponsoring religious community. This led to the founding of schools for poor children throughout the industrial cities of England, which in turn led to the establishment of Methodist schools, colleges and universities around the world. In the United States, this Methodist educational tradition has been particularly strong, with the United Methodist Church’s General Board of Higher Education and Ministry listing 93 Methodist-related senior colleges and universities, including Boston University, Emory, and Duke.

Huntingdon College Vision Statement

Huntingdon College, a liberal arts college offering an undergraduate education, is committed to a teaching and learning environment that provides its graduates with an educational experience meeting the College’s vision.

II.ii. The Last 20 Years: Enrollment and Engagement

Before the 1990s, Huntingdon had not tried to position itself as a highly selective institution, seeing its mission as giving access to higher education to underserved students from Alabama and the West Florida panhandle. But in the last 20 years Huntingdon was facing shrinking
enrollment, partly due to the increased competition from Auburn University of Montgomery (established in 1967) which had grown to become an even lower-cost alternative for many of the students who might previously have chosen Huntingdon College. And so, in the 1990s the school sought to re-brand and reposition itself as a premier, highly selective institution of distinction. An ambitious and innovative curriculum was put in place (including the Liberal Arts Symposium) and many highly qualified students were brought to Huntingdon on full scholarships, in hopes that tuition-paying students would follow. Many highly qualified students did indeed come and the average ACT for incoming Huntingdon students did rise, albeit slightly. However, not enough non-scholarship students enrolled to offset the loss of what had been Huntingdon College’s student base for so many years, namely students from less privileged backgrounds. This resulted in dramatic declines in enrollment and severe financial hardship for the College.

In 2003, J. Cameron West assumed the presidency of the college with the goal to return Huntingdon to its historic roots in the Methodist mission of providing accessible high-quality liberal education to a broad spectrum of students. Along with this revival of its traditional educational objectives, Huntingdon also increased its participation in intercollegiate athletics. Huntingdon became a member of NCAA Division III in 1999, and the football program was initiated in 2003. Men’s basketball had already returned in 1997, while cross country and women’s golf were just recently added in 2007. In total, there are now seven men’s sports (football, basketball, baseball, cross-country, golf, soccer, and tennis) and seven women’s sports (basketball, cross country, golf, soccer, softball, tennis, and volleyball). These athletic programs have also generated related activities, such as cheerleading, dance team, and marching band. These have proven to be successful enrollment strategies, as over the past few years Huntingdon has experienced its highest enrollment in almost 40 years.

This growth was also facilitated by the reintroduction of several programs that had traditionally been strong at Huntingdon and can be broadly classified as “pre-professional.” Since 2003, Accounting, Elementary Education, Music Education, Youth Ministry, Christian Education, and Physical Education programs have all been reintroduced.

II.i.ii. Huntingdon and the QEP: Critical Thinking and Student Engagement

But this success with enrollment has itself produced problems for the college. Huntingdon’s historical and present mission/vision—to provide a high quality liberal arts education to men and women and nurture them in faith, wisdom, and service—has been made more difficult with the arrival of so many new students. We have had many conversations, focus groups, and informal discussions about the QEP with the faculty, and there appears to be a consensus that our faculty sees our students as unprepared, academically and psychologically, for the intellectual rigors of higher education. This lack of preparation is a significant hurdle in helping our current student population achieve the kind of liberal arts education that Huntingdon values. Our challenge lies in finding a way to provide our students a liberal arts education that ranges across disciplines while engendering an appreciation for the life of the mind and the importance of ideas. In short, we want our students to become what the influential AAC&U publication Greater Expectations calls empowered, informed, and responsible “intentional learners” (xi).
Huntingdon’s QEP will address this problem by focusing on the acquisition and development of critical thinking skills, skills that lie at the foundation of practically all intellectual pursuits. In other words, the goal of Huntingdon’s QEP is to develop our students’ critical thinking skills so that they can take ownership of their own educational development, and so take pride in their education.

More specifically, our official goal is to produce critical thinkers who can actively engage with significant issues across the disciplines.

The goal of the Huntingdon’s Quality Enhancement Plan is to produce critical thinkers who can engage actively with significant issues across academic disciplines.

III. Huntingdon College’s QEP—The Art of Critical Thinking:

III.i. The Art of Critical Thinking in Three Steps

The title of our QEP is “ACT: The Art of Critical Thinking.” Our motto is “Engage the Mind: Engage the Student” because we believe that the research demonstrates that empowered, engaged, and intentional learners are those who can think for themselves in a creative but disciplined manner.

We plan on achieving this goal through three interrelated steps. Our first step, and the primary focus of our QEP, is the development of a freshmen seminar in critical thinking known as the PACT, or Practicing the Art of Critical Thinking, which will commence in the fall of 2010. Our next two steps will be developed simultaneously. Over the next five years we will work to integrate critical thinking practices throughout our core curriculum, and to develop guidelines and requirements for high-level critical thinking “culminating experiences” for all upper-level students in all academic disciplines.

The Art of Critical Thinking:
Three Steps to “Engage the Mind, Engage the Student”

1) The development of the PACT Colloquium, a freshman seminar on practicing the art of critical thinking.
2) The integration of explicit critical thinking practices across the core curriculum.
3) The development of culminating experiences across departments that demonstrate high-level critical thinking skills.
**III.ii. Critical Thinking and Huntingdon Students**

This focus on critical thinking is not new to Huntingdon. The very first goal listed in Huntingdon’s mission statement is to “ensure that each student will study a core curriculum that develops the student’s ability to comprehend new ideas, to *examine concepts critically*, and to communicate clearly” (emphasis added).

Recognition of the importance of critical thinking and the life of the mind is not restricted to the mission statement. In preparation for the development of the QEP, Huntingdon faculty reviewed the student learning outcomes for each of its programs. It turned out that 13 out of 15 departments identify the ability to think critically as one of the learning outcomes for their majors. In the IDEA student evaluation forms used by Huntingdon, 62% of faculty rated “learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments and points of view” as either “essential or important.” On the same form, 84% of faculty rated “learning to apply course material to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions as “essential” or “important.”

It is clearly important to the faculty that students be critical thinkers who can engage educational challenges as active learners. And according to Huntingdon’s latest NSSE findings, when it comes to rating the frequency of activities related to critical thinking and active learning, Huntingdon students rate Huntingdon nearly equal to its selected and Carnegie peers.

**NSSE Data**

*During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized the following mental activities?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Activity:</th>
<th>Huntingdon FY</th>
<th>Selected Peers FY</th>
<th>Carnegie Peers FY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analyzing</strong> the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Synthesizing</strong> and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Making Judgments</strong> about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered data and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions.</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Applying</strong> theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>FY</th>
<th>SR</th>
<th>Selected Peers</th>
<th>Carnegie Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking critically and analytically</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing clearly and effectively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking clearly and effectively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite this student perception, Huntingdon faculty still often cite our students’ inability to think critically and lack of active engagement as impediments to our students’ education. Ironically, though, Huntingdon students rank “level of academic challenge” at Huntingdon as rather low compared to other areas such as “active and collaborative learning” and student-faculty interaction. In fact, positive student responses from both Huntingdon freshmen and seniors to questions having to do with “level of academic challenge” on the National Survey of Student Engagement are statistically lower than its selected peers or Carnegie peers.

The reasons for this perceived lack of academic challenge are many, but it is our hope that our QEP will not only increase our students’ sense of being challenged, but also give them the tools necessary to embrace and thrive on those challenges.
III.iii. Three Challenges that Led to the Development of our Critical Thinking QEP

Huntingdon faces three interrelated challenges to achieving the goal of increasing student engagement through the development of critical thinking skills.

First, a significant majority of students attend Huntingdon with the primary purpose of participating in intercollegiate athletics or being involved in athletics-related activities. Close to two-thirds of Huntingdon students are athletes, cheerleaders, in the band, on the dance team, or otherwise involved in athletic program activities. In the CIRP Freshman Survey, when asked to cite the reasons for their decision to attend Huntingdon, 46% of men and 31% of women rated “the athletic department recruited me” as “very important.” Among men, only “I was offered financial aid” (47.2%) ranked higher. So while the overall academic profile of our incoming student has not changed dramatically from its historical norm, the reason that students are attending Huntingdon certainly has. Of course, we see no conflict between education and athletic participation; athletic discipline is more often than not conducive to intellectual discipline, and student athletes often make the best students. But when a majority of students are attracted to the college on the basis of athletics, it can create an expectation gap. We need to address this gap, and help our student-athletes adjust to the life of the mind in college.

Second, many of our students arrive unprepared for the rigors of higher-level critical thinking. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the 2007 entering class at Huntingdon came from the Alabama Public School system. According to information published by the testing service ACT Inc. (formerly the American College Testing Program) only 16% of the Alabama students who take the ACT are academically prepared to undertake college-level work in all four of the measured core competencies. Over the past five years, the average composite ACT score of entering Huntingdon students was approximately 21.7. The average ACT score for all Alabama students that take the exam is 20.1. The most common ACT score for the entering freshman class at Huntingdon College is 20. And yet our students’ confidence in their academic skills is high. Seventy percent of incoming students across the country believe their academic ability is above average or in the highest 10% among people their age (Higher Education Research Institute Study), and Huntingdon students fit that trend; 60% believe that their academic ability is “above average” or in the highest 10% of their age group.

Moreover, many Huntingdon freshmen have markedly low expectations of the amount of work they must do to succeed in college. Nationally, 66% of 2003 entering first year students spent less than six hours per week doing homework in 12th grade. Among Huntingdon students the percentage was even lower. On the 2007 CIRP Freshman Survey, nearly half of entering Huntingdon students indicated that they spent less than 2 hours per week studying, and 75% spent five hours or less per week studying. This contrasts with the traditional faculty expectation of at least 3-5 hours of studying each week per class (and a typical Huntingdon student takes five classes per semester).
During your last year in high school, how much time did you spend during a typical week doing the following: Studying/homework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Huntingdon College Men</th>
<th>Huntingdon College Women</th>
<th>Huntingdon College Total</th>
<th>All other 4-year Religious Colleges Men</th>
<th>All other 4-year Religious Colleges Women</th>
<th>All other 4-year Religious Colleges Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 hour</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 hours</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 hours</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 hours</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 hours</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;20 hours</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, we need to recognize this deficit in our students’ preparation and expectations, and help them acculturate to the world of higher education. This is not, of course, simply a question of teaching remedial information. Certainly, we are working to address the need for remedial education in our different disciplines; but remediation is not the focus of our QEP. We want to address a broader philosophical and pedagogical problem—how to make our students better thinkers. If we can make them better thinkers, more actively engaged with ideas and information, they can become better learners.

Finally, our third obstacle is that a majority of our students have little or no familial history with higher education, and therefore many of them view higher education as having little value except as, essentially, vocational training. According to the CIRP Freshman Survey, most of our students, at least 55%, come from families where one or more parents do not have a college degree. And 68% of Huntingdon Freshmen indicated that they strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement that “the chief benefit of a college education is that it increases one’s earning power.” While this is certainly not out-of-line with the general culture’s understanding of higher education’s value, it is certainly a major obstacle faced by Huntingdon College in achieving its goal of developing critical thinkers and engaged learners who value the life of the mind. In general, our students come from secondary educational environments that foster passive learning, where they often view their coursework as a mere means to a diploma rather than to an education which will help them grow in “faith, wisdom, and service.” We need to address this disconnect between our expectations as a faculty and our students’ devaluing of the life of the mind. This is the goal of the ACT program.

In the most practical sense, we need to address this disconnect between student and faculty expectations because it has likely played a significant role in depressing Huntingdon’s retention and graduation rates. In 2006, our freshman-to-sophomore retention rate was as low as 55%. In 2008/2009 it had increased to 65%; however, this remains below the average of 78.9% for four-year private institutions and is, in fact, closer to the average for two year public institutions (55.8%) (Mid-Year Retention Indicators 3). There are, of course, multiple reasons for such
It is with these problems in mind that we set out to develop our QEP.

**III.iv. Timeline of the QEP’s Development**

The following is a timeline of the development of Huntingdon’s Quality Enhancement Plan. This timeline provides only the basic outline of the process. For more on the thought behind the development of Huntingdon’s QEP, see the following sections of this report: II.v: The QEP from ‘Student Engagement’ to ‘Critical Thinking’; III: The QEP’s First Step: the PACT Colloquium; III.i: Why a First Year Class; III.ii: Huntingdon’s History of First-Year Classes.

| Summer 2008: Meeting of Reaccreditation Committee | The first step in the development of Huntingdon College’s Quality Enhancement Plan was the convening of the Reaccreditation Committee. The committee decided on a process for broad-based participation in QEP development. After the committee examined assessment data on student success and engagement at Huntingdon College it identified five areas from within Huntingdon’s Mission on which to focus:
| Comprehend new ideas
| Examine concepts critically
| Communicate clearly
| Religious development
| Aesthetic expression |
| Aug. 18-20, 2008: Faculty Forum | As part of the three-day faculty workshop, input was sought from faculty about possible topics for the QEP. Prior to the forum, all faculty members were provided with QEP guidelines and abstracts of QEPs from other institutions. After a PowerPoint overview of the process and guidelines, the faculty was divided into five working groups of approximately 10 faculty members each and given two hours to discuss possible ideas. Following the individual sessions, each group reported their ideas to the full faculty. All ideas were collected, typed and sent to the faculty via e-mail.

There was a general consensus among faculty that students seemed disengaged from the learning process. They often failed to see the importance of what they were learning or treated education as merely a means to a degree. |
<p>| Sept. 2008: Solicitation of Ideas from Huntingdon Constituents | A website was set up for soliciting and posting QEP ideas. An email letter was sent out to all faculty, students, staff, trustees, and selected alumni soliciting input. All responses were posted on the website. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sept-Oct 2008: QEP Initial Selection Committee | The QEP Initial Selection Committee was established. The three faculty representatives were voted onto the committee at the September, 2008 faculty meeting.  
- Jay Dorman, Senior Vice President for Administration and Planning  
- Erastus Dudley, Professor of Biology and Dean of School of Mathematics and Sciences  
- Kyle Fedler, Vice President for Academic Affairs  
- Mark Liatti, Assistant Professor of Mathematics  
- Jeri Morris, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies  
- Sid Stubbs, Associate Vice President for Institutional Assessment and Compliance  
- Jackie Trimble, Associate Professor of English  
The QEP Initial Selection Committee convened and examined all of the ideas submitted for consideration. The committee eliminated many ideas and combined others, eventually sending forth five broad ideas for further consideration. These topics were:  
  - Critical Thinking by Examining Big Ideas  
  - Communication Across the Curriculum  
  - Aesthetics Across the Curriculum  
  - Stewardship and Environmentalism  
  - First-year Student Engagement |
| Oct 3, 2008: Faculty In-service Friday | The decision of the QEP Initial Selection Committee was disseminated to the faculty and staff. On Oct. 3rd the faculty reviewed the five ideas. The faculty were divided into five groups and given the task of identifying the potential strengths and weaknesses of the ideas. Following the breakout sessions, each group reported their findings with the full faculty. |
| Oct. 23, 2008: Presentation to Board of Trustees | Associate Vice-President Sid Stubbs gave a presentation to the Academic Affairs committee of the Board of Trustees, outlining the QEP guidelines and proposed process. |
| Nov. 7, 2008: Reconvening of Reaccreditation Committee | The Reaccreditation Committee met and discussed the five ideas and the comments of the faculty. The committee unanimously agreed to recommend two of the five topics for further examination:  
1. Developing a communication across the curriculum program  
2. Focusing on critical thinking skills to encourage students to be more actively engaged and invested in their education. |
| Nov. 15, 2008: President West approves Two Topics for Further Examination | President West was given a summary of the five ideas with the recommendation of the Reaccreditation Committee to further examine two of the five:  
1) First-year Engagement  
2) Communication Across the Curriculum. President West approved the recommendation. |
**Nov. 16-20, 2008:** **White Paper Committee Formed**  
A white paper committee was formed to write brief (2-3 page) white papers on the two ideas. These committees consisted of the following members:
- James Albritton, Assistant Professor of History
- Frank Buckner, Professor of Religion
- Jamie Demick, Instructor of Physics
- Lisa Dorman, Associate Dean of Faculty
- Kyle Fedler, Vice President for Academic Affairs
- Jennifer Fremlin, Associate Professor of English
- Jeri Morris, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies
- Ann Phillips, Assistant Professor of Psychology
- James Truman, Assistant Professor of English

**Dec. 9, 2008:** **President West Chooses Quality Enhancement Plan**  
On Dec. 9, 2009 President West was provided with two white papers: “First-Year Engagement” and “Communication Across the Curriculum.” After consultative review with the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, President West chose “First-Year Engagement” as Huntingdon College’s Quality Enhancement Plan.

**Dec. 2008:** **QEP Working Committee Formed**  
Dr. James Truman was chosen as lead author and co-chair. The full membership of the committee is as follows:
- Frank Buckner, (co-chair), Professor of Religion
- James Truman, (co-chair), Assistant Professor of English
- Cinzia Balit-Moussalli, Associate Dean of Faculty
- Lisa Dorman, Associate Dean of Faculty
- Erastus Dudley, Professor of Biology
- Kyle Fedler, Vice President for Academic Affairs
- Frank Parsons, Vice President for Student Life
- Alyce Penniman, Student
- Angelica Trammell, Student
- Heath Miller, Student

The committee spent a great deal of the first part of the spring semester exploring the issue of student engagement.

**Jan. 12, 2009:** **Meeting with SACS Liaison**  
QEP White Paper Committee met with SACS liaison Dr. Cheryl Cardell to receive input on preliminary plan for QEP. During this meeting Dr. Cardell provided valuable input. In particular, she encouraged the committee to be very specific about learning outcomes and to focus the QEP on a narrower goal than “student engagement.”

**Jan. 30, 2009:** **Faculty Workshop**  
An in-service event was held on Friday, Jan. 30, a day in which no classes were scheduled. All faculty were required to attend. The faculty participated in discussions about various aspects of the QEP, led by co-chairs Frank Buckner and James Truman.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 13, 2009</td>
<td>An in-service event was held on Friday, Feb. 13, a day in which no classes were scheduled. All faculty were required to attend. The faculty participated</td>
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<td>in discussions about various aspects of the QEP, led by co-chairs Frank Buckner and James Truman. This discussion built upon the previous comments and</td>
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<td>suggestions from the Jan. 30 event.</td>
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<td>April 23, 2009</td>
<td>The QEP working committee gave a survey to approximately 80 students asking, among other things, for suggested topics for the critical thinking course.</td>
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<td>March 5, 2009</td>
<td>Lisa Dorman, Associate Dean of Faculty, conducted a student focus group on the proposed QEP. The focus group consisted of five students at various levels in</td>
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<td>their college careers. The student responses were recorded (with names deleted) and a summary reviewed by the QEP working committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 19, 2009</td>
<td>Lisa Dorman, Associate Dean of Faculty, conducted a student focus group on the proposed QEP. The focus group consisted of six students at various levels in</td>
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<td>their college careers. The student responses were recorded (with names deleted) and a summary reviewed by the QEP working committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 27, 2009</td>
<td>Two faculty focus groups, made up of approximately 10-12 faculty members each, participated in a focus group discussion concerning the QEP from 11:00-12:30.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Each group was asked the same questions and their responses recorded. The QEP Working Committee reviewed faculty responses at its following weekly</td>
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<td>meeting.</td>
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<td>July 17-23, 2009</td>
<td>QEP Working Committee co-chairs and Vice President for Academic Affairs attended the Foundation for Critical Thinking conference in Berkeley, California.</td>
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<td>Huntingdon participants attended presentations delivered by representatives of other institutions using the Paul/Elder model of critical thinking in their QEPs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug. 14, 2009</td>
<td>A draft of the QEP was given to the President and to the Institutional Effectiveness Committee for input and comments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug. 17, 2009</td>
<td>A full-day workshop on the ACT QEP was conducted with all faculty in attendance. The final draft version of the QEP proposal was presented and comments</td>
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<td>and suggestions were elicited.</td>
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**III.v. The QEP, from “Student Engagement” to “Critical Thinking”**

When the White Paper Committee began its work on the QEP, our initial discussions focused on enhancing student engagement and student retention. We felt that we should address our students’ detachment directly, and so we contemplated several ideas that involved instituting cultural changes on campus. Our goal was for students to understand and value their education for its own sake. In essence, we wanted to establish an institutional culture that would acculturate new students into the “life of the mind.” As we said in the white paper, the overarching aspiration of Huntingdon College’s QEP is to help students understand, appreciate, and even take pride in their liberal arts education. We, as an institution, want our students to come away from their experience at Huntingdon understanding what it means to be a member of an intellectual community—to be an active critical thinker, to be able to synthesize together knowledge from different academic disciplines, and to carry forth that intellectual approach into their lives beyond college.

Our primary student outcomes were defined in lofty and abstract terms, like “appreciate” and “take pride in.” We wanted to make a window into each student’s soul. But as we progressed in our development of the QEP, and particularly after our meeting with our SACS liaison Dr. Cardell, we came to realize that such vague goals were impossibly difficult, both to achieve and to assess.

But even at the earliest moments in our discussions, the idea of teaching critical thinking, both in a first-year class and then integrated across the core, was already part of our plan. When we declared that we wanted students to understand “what it means to be a member of an intellectual community,” we defined that as being “an active critical thinker.” So, we decided that rather than having students’ simply “understand” what it is to be a critical thinker, we would focus on helping them *become* critical thinkers. And so we shifted the QEP’s emphasis from First Year Engagement, as it had been initially written by the white paper committee, to a more measurable emphasis on critical thinking, which would (we hope) produce the desired secondary effect of increasing student engagement.

And so, the first step in executing our plan is to develop a new first-year class that introduces students to critical thinking from an interdisciplinary perspective.

**IV. The QEP’s First Step--the PACT Colloquium:**

**IV.i. Why a First Year Class**

While the PACT course is the primary focus of our QEP, we must emphasize that it is *simply the first step in the process of helping our students develop their critical thinking skills.* We can only *introduce* critical thinking skills in a first year class—we need to follow our students development as critical thinkers throughout their academic careers, first through the core curriculum, and finally to an upper-level culminating experience that encourages the development of in-depth critical thinking.
In fact, as we considered how to introduce and develop critical thinking skills in a more systematic and deliberate manner, the committee discussed the option of bypassing a first-year course entirely, and immediately integrating critical thinking frameworks, vocabulary, and techniques into already existing courses. And while this option is attractive, and has been developed at other institutions such as the University of Louisville, we determined that it was less effective for Huntingdon. Whereas institutions like the University of Louisville have the institutional capacity to support such a complex and ambitious plan, we needed a clear and defined starting place from which our larger ACT plan could be developed, a base on which to build our students’ critical thinking superstructure.

Additionally, two main factors influenced the decision to begin with the development of a first-semester freshman course focused on critical thinking: first, the extensive literature on the efficacy of freshmen seminars and second, Huntingdon’s long experience with freshmen seminars.

First, the evidence is fairly convincing that freshmen seminars have a disproportionate positive impact upon student learning, retention, and approach to education. In their study of 20 years of research on college-level teaching, Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini concluded that, “the weight of the evidence suggests that a first-semester freshman seminar is positively linked with both freshman-year persistence and degree completion. This positive link persists even when academic aptitude and secondary school achievement are taken into account” (419). And Paul Fidler and Mary Stuart Hunter, in their 1990 study of the effectiveness of first-year seminars, summarize their research by saying “there is ample evidence that freshmen seminars are associated with improved freshman retention” (216). Of course, retention is only a byproduct of student engagement which itself is a product of students who can think critically. If our PACT program is going to have a truly transformational effect, we must capture our students’ minds and attitudes from the moment they enter. As Lee Upcraft, John Gardner, et al declare in their study of first-year programs, there is “overwhelming evidence that student success is largely determined by experiences during the freshman year…The freshman seminar is a proven and effective way of enhancing student success. It can be the glue that holds together and solidifies all efforts to enhance freshman academic and personal success” (5-6). Likewise Betsy Barefoot et al, when describing thirteen "Institutions of Excellence” in their book Achieving and Sustaining Institutional Excellence for the First Year of College, declare that out of the thirteen institutions “ten employ some version of the first-year seminar, sometimes as a stand-alone course, but more often as one of several linked courses in a learning community” (391). If the goal is not merely adding one more class to the list of required courses but a change in the way students approach their educational experience, it is vital that we set the tone for critical thinking from the very first semester.

Second, Huntingdon has a great deal of experience developing and running first-year classes. In the last 10 years, Huntingdon has run two very different forms of first-year classes. First, from 1995 to 2004, the college developed and ran the Liberal Arts Symposium (LAS), an ambitious, interdisciplinary, team-taught, seminar-style first-year class on a broad range of intellectual and cultural issues. Then, from 2005 to 2009, the college has run the First Year Experience (FYEx), a less ambitious class that is designed as a general introduction to college life.
**IV.ii. Huntingdon’s History of First-Year Classes**

Huntingdon College’s experience with its Liberal Arts Symposium program provided a good deal of information regarding the benefits and potential pitfalls of first-year, interdisciplinary seminars. The LAS was designed to introduce students to the liberal arts through the Bible and its influence in culture. The Symposia will trace various themes across cultures, historical periods, texts, and disciplines. Students will read texts drawn from the Bible, literature, philosophy, psychology, history, economics, and the sciences. In addition students will examine art, music, dance, film, drama and other expressions that help to illuminate the particular theme for that semester. Examples of themes include the following: origins, values and change, good and evil, nature and human nature, innocence and experience, and God and history (Huntingdon Current Students site).

The goal of the program was to engage freshmen in broad topics that would help illustrate for students that knowledge in a liberal arts education was not compartmentalized, but flows across disciplines. This was a very ambitious program, designed to speak to the most intellectually active and engaged students, addressing complex philosophical, literary, and theological questions related to the theme of the semester.

Originally only a one-credit course, but now being run for three-credits, Huntingdon’s FYEx (First-Year Experience) program (which will run through fall 2009) is “designed to ease the transition between high school and college. Topics covered in this required course include college adjustment issues such as time management, the College Honor Code, and social pressures; study, research, and writing skills; exploring career options; and discussions of current world issues and trends” (Huntingdon Academics site).

**IV.iii. What We Learned from these First-year Classes**

The Liberal Arts Symposium (LAS) was a well-conceived and well-organized class, and at Huntingdon’s last SACS accreditation it received commendation for its innovative practice. Its dissolution had many causes, but a few in particular apply to building the new interdisciplinary PACT colloquium.

The LAS was designed to be interdisciplinary, but it foundered because the administration was not able to find enough faculty to teach. Departments retreated, as it were, into their majors. That is to say, departments gave an understandable priority to fulfilling and maintaining their obligations to the students majoring in their disciplines.

Therefore, if an interdisciplinary core curriculum course such as PACT is to succeed, it must be given curricular priority. Not only will this help maintain faculty engagement and keep the class energized, it is vital to the long-term success of our critical thinking agenda. When an interdisciplinary core is viewed as the spine of the College’s curriculum and not as some ancillary appendage, then, philosophically and pedagogically speaking, it becomes possible to develop major requirements that follow logically from the core and thus avoid the problem of
insularity. For if only part of the faculty are able to teach in the core, this learning objective cannot be met as effectively.

Moreover, the ambitious and wide-ranging content of the LAS, which was in one way central to the successes of the LAS, was also one of its significant weaknesses. The LAS had significant engagement only from a fairly self-selecting element both of the student body and of the faculty. A class that introduces students to extensive readings from Freud, Proust, Descartes, Darwin, Pascal, Thomas Carlyle, Saint Augustine, Clarence Darrow, Thomas Paine, Plato, and the entirety of Book IX of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* all in one semester is certainly a vigorous intellectual challenge, but it is one that is difficult for many students (and even faculty) to manage. In many ways, the class became a victim of its own ambition.

The FYEx program, even in its three-hour version, has significant structural difficulties. From the faculty’s perspective there are two major problems. First, it has tried to cover too much ground, introducing students to everything from computer literacy to public speaking to study skills. Moreover, the class sizes are far too large to establish student/faculty rapport—classes in the fall of 2008 were generally of 30 or more students, and in the fall of 2009 average 27 students.

From the students’ perspective, the three-hour class was significantly more effective than the one-hour version. A student focus group, performed on March 19th, 2009, asked what was most effective about the FYEx class—and students responded that the use of the Tim O’Brien book *The Things They Carried* as a central text was a significant improvement in the class, saying that it, and its attendant topics of discussion “relates to every student and many different aspects of student life.”

But while this new version was more effective, it still was fundamentally ineffective at engaging students in the worldview of higher education. This lack of engagement was apparent in the focus group; even as they said the topic of the class “relates to every student,” they also said that they “believed that Huntingdon could have better FYEx classes if they only had teachers that were emotionally involved in the class.” In conversation with the students on the QEP committee, it became apparent that not only did the overly ambitious goals of the class alienate students, but the focus on using O’Brien’s Vietnam experience was simply too distant for students to engage with on a personal level. In fact, it became clear that many students simply did not read the book. The topic, it seemed, simply was not engaging, either to students or faculty. As one of the student members of the QEP committee commented, “Vietnam was a long time ago—most of us just didn’t have an opinion about it. We need something ‘scandalous,’ something we can’t be ‘on the fence’ about.”

**IV.iv. Why a First-Year Class on Critical Thinking: A Focus on Empowerment**

Our experience with the LAS and FYEx taught us the need for a clear approach that remained realistically focused on engaging our students. The LAS and FYEx lost students for opposite reasons—the LAS lost students who were not already operating at a high intellectual level, while
the FYEx lost students because it focused too much on the practical and the technical, and not enough on engaging students as thinkers. Extensive faculty discussion led us to conclude that we need a class that will reach out to our students and integrate them into the world of college-level thinking.

Thus the committee determined that a focus on teaching critical thinking, initially in the first-year and then throughout the curriculum, would achieve our goals.

As a faculty, we agreed that critical thinking is a powerful way of looking at the world. It is the process of observing subjects from an unbiased point of view, asking thoughtful, informed questions, and developing well-supported answers. This way of thinking underlies every aspect of higher education; it is what makes college about more than just the acquisition of knowledge. Higher education calls for the development of the intellectual capability to apply knowledge as an active thinker. The PACT colloquium will give all of our incoming students a shared understanding of this core intellectual value and help ensure their later academic success.

As our concern is with reaching our disengaged and unmotivated students, this focus will be particularly useful; it will give our students a set of active thinking skills they will be able to use when they are engaged as members of a learning community. They will feel empowered as thinkers, and thus be more ready to embrace the intellectual life of higher education.

We feel it is vital to begin our students’ acculturation to the life of the mind as early as possible in their college careers. The new first-year class, the PACT Colloquium, which will be part of the core curriculum, will introduce our students (on a basic level) to the skills that constitute critical thinking—the disciplined intellectual process that is at the core of all academic disciplines.

Many times in discussion, students and faculty who were here in the last days of the LAS class would remark that the PACT colloquium seemed to be a resurrection of LAS, both in its content and as an interdisciplinary course taught by faculty from all departments. To a degree, they are right, in that like the LAS, the PACT is supposed to be an introduction to the intellectual life of higher education.

But the LAS experience has led us to make several clear distinctions between the programs. The PACT colloquium is unlike the LAS in at least two ways. First, it is a skills-based class rather than a content-based class. The LAS centered on complex and challenging content, with the analysis and discussion of complex philosophical, aesthetic, and theological ideas. It was very successful at that, with a high degree of student engagement. It was, though, not as successful at producing thinking skills that would extend beyond those particular problems addressed in the class to other elements of the students’ academic experience. In essence, it suffered from the “silo effect.” The PACT colloquium, on the other hand, places primary emphasis on critical thinking skills, which will be transferable from this class to the rest of the core.

But critical thinking is more than just an abstract skill—it is an empowering way of looking at the world. It is this empowerment effect that we believe will engage our students. The power of
critical thinking is widely recognized by scholars in the field. As Richard Paul and Lynda Elder, two of the dominant figures in critical thinking scholarship, describe it,

critical thinking…provides the tools of mind you need to think through anything and everything that requires thought—in college and in life. As your intellectual skills develop, you gain instruments that you can use deliberately and mindfully to better reason through the thinking tasks implicit in your short-and long-range goals. There are better and worse ways to pursue whatever you are after. Good thinking enables you to maximize the better ways and minimize the worse (Paul & Elder xxi).

Other scholars attribute more dramatic, even revolutionary, power to critical thinking. Ronald Barnett declares that “through critical thought, students cannot just come to free themselves from dependency on their former taken-for-granted worlds, but can also be free from dependency on any world, at least in theory….Students realize that they are free to build their own cognitive universe” (4). While this extreme form of liberation is, Barnett concedes, hypothetical at best, he declares that when college teachers “embrace not just the capacities to think critically but to understand oneself critically and to act critically, higher education becomes the formation of critical persons who are not subject to the world but able to act autonomously and purposively within it” (4).

At Huntingdon we embrace a definition of critical thinking as a powerful tool that extends beyond the discrete boundaries of the college. In fact, this definition fits well with Huntingdon’s motto, enjoining students to “go forth and apply wisdom in service.” We understand, though, that these broader ambitions of empowerment go well beyond the scope of any effect we can have in a first-year class. We envision this PACT colloquium as an introduction to the basic skills of critical thinking, and to the basic transferability of those skills across academic disciplines. We want to keep the PACT colloquium, and the ACT program as a whole, focused on the students as life-long critical thinkers, with the premise that the if we are able, as John Bean says, “to convert students from passive to active learners,” (Bean 122), when our students leave Huntingdon they will be what Barnett calls “critical beings” able to take “critical action” (4) in their communities.

IV.v. The PACT as the “Spine” of our Core Curriculum’s Focus on Critical Thinking

We are, of course, already teaching critical thinking in a variety of different forms in many of our core classes. The goal of the PACT colloquium is to begin to unite those diverse approaches to critical thinking, which will help our students see how this way of looking at the world crosses different disciplines. Our goal is for our students to become better “intentional learners” when confronting thinking from a variety of perspectives; as the authors of *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* declare:

individuals who are empowered and informed are likely to arise from teaching that uses intellectual skills within rich disciplinary and multidisciplinary contexts. Complex capacities like creativity and reflection are honed as students encounter knowledge in new contexts and open-ended or unscripted problems (32).
By making explicit how similar processes are being used across disciplines, these newly empowered students will (we hope) begin to understand the shared intellectual endeavor of our academic community. This will help them feel more a part of our community and optimize their potential for success in college.

Since critical thinking is not restricted to one discipline, the entire faculty has a stake in our students’ (and our own) shared understanding of critical thinking. Therefore, it is our intention that this class will be taught by faculty from many departments, and not from a single disciplinary perspective. We want each student to be able to transfer her/his critical thinking skills from one class to the next, and be constantly developing as an intellectual.

The committee envisions the PACT course as the “spine” of our core curriculum—as it introduces students to the tools of critical thinking, students will feel empowered to take charge of their own educational experience, and then be more likely to transfer their thinking skills from one course to the next throughout their college experience. The PACT colloquium will be designed to introduce students to this sort of active transference as it will be taught from an interdisciplinary perspective by faculty from across the disciplines.

**IV.vi. Critical Thinking: The Huntingdon Faculty’s Definition**

Our experiences with both the LAS and FYEx have taught us that faculty buy-in is vitally important to the development of an effective interdisciplinary first-year class. Therefore, the first step in encouraging faculty buy-in is to design the very philosophical premises of the course with the input of the entire faculty.

Therefore, as reflected in the earlier timeline, on Friday, Feb. 13th, the QEP working committee led a faculty workshop on the development of the PACT colloquium. The focus of the workshop was to develop a Huntingdon definition of critical thinking that would be sufficiently cross-disciplinary to speak to all our various departments. Since the committee had recognized that almost all of the core disciplines use the term “critical thinking” or one of its synonyms in their various core learning outcomes, our hope was that this discussion would be a way to share the different vocabularies we would use to describe critical thinking.

We asked the faculty to split into disciplinary groups and define what “critical thinking” meant in each of their disciplines, and to describe how they teach critical thinking in their core classes.

As we suspected, there was little disagreement about the basic premises of critical thinking; what animated the conversation was the different sorts of vocabularies we used to define the concept for ourselves, and for our students.

While our discussion was wide-ranging and varied, it was unified around two concepts—first, critical thinking is a state of mind, a way of viewing the world. Second, critical thinking is a process, emerging from that state of mind, which produces new knowledge and ideas.

**Huntingdon Faculty View Critical Thinking as A State of Mind**
In general, the Huntingdon faculty agreed that they wanted students to be able to “step outside themselves,” to see the world from a perspective that is not defined solely by their personal and subjective point of view. We want them to be able, as one faculty member phrased it, “to step outside their cultural box.” We want them to question not just the ideas of others, but of their own assumptions, to get beyond their own subjective “likes and dislikes,” and to get away from a sense that having an “opinion” is a value unto itself.

We, as a faculty, came to define this mindset several ways. We wanted students to be able to see the world “skeptically, but not cynically.” We wanted them to be “fair-minded but discriminating.” We wanted them to be “non-emotional or dispassionate,” able to see the world rationally, with “logical consistency.”

But simultaneously we do not want our students to be passive, detached observers—we want them to be able to think creatively. (The term “objective” was not generally used, as it implies neutrality and lack of creative engagement.) One of the best phrasings came from the math department, which declared that we wanted students “to exercise creativity rooted in logic.”

Most importantly, this rational, disinterested mindset does not operate in a vacuum. It involves engagement with an equally rational, skeptical, and fair-minded community of thinkers. Critical thinking is about the pursuit of truth by a community of like-minded thinkers all striving for the same goal. When there is a disagreement, it is not a personal conflict of subjective opinions, but an exchange of informed opinions, or arguments, assessed rationally and fairly, leading to new ideas and new knowledge.

Huntingdon Faculty View Critical Thinking as a Process

Critical thinking is, of course, not simply a mindset, but a process; a skill that can be developed. The mindset, we generally agreed, is the base upon which we want our students to develop their thinking skills.

In our discussion, the faculty described these skills in various ways. The natural sciences faculty began with a definition of the scientific method, a process of formulating questions, collecting and evaluating information, and reaching tentative conclusions. The conversation that followed built upon this model, with different disciplines describing their processes of critical thinking in relation to the scientific method. Members of the history and economics faculty described the need to recognize “cause and effect” patterns, and the ability to make predictions based on the assessment of information. The literature and communication faculty described the process of
reading, analyzing, and interpreting texts. The math and social science faculty raised the idea of “creative problem solving.”

All of our ideas generally fell into a three-step process—
- First, the critical thinker must be open-minded, rational, and actively engaged when meeting new ideas.
- Second, the critical thinker must be able to understand and assess new ideas and information.
- Finally, she/he can form new and creative responses to those ideas and that information, and be able to communicate those ideas to other open-minded thinkers.

This process may be more linear and incremental in some fields, while more organic and recursive in others—but generally we saw our approaches as analogous.

**IV.vii. Critical Thinking: Scholarly Definitions**

Huntingdon’s collective definition of critical thinking squares quite well with the vast array of scholarly work on the subject. Our faculty’s notion of helping students “step outside their cultural box,” to see the world beyond their own unchallenged “opinions,” is discussed as the “values shift” that is a vital first step in developing effective critical thinking (Paul and Elder 31). Barrett declares that “through a genuine higher education, students come to live in a different world” (4). Ken Bain, in *What the Best College Teachers Do* describes these best teachers as helping students reach “expectation failure” where they must confront a world beyond their received opinions, and must realize “the problems they face in believing what they believe” (28).

Our goal to have our students see the world “skeptically, but not cynically,” to be “fair-minded but discriminating,” to see the world with “logical consistency” parallels what scholars like Paul and Elder, Barnett, and others define as “universal intellectual standards” (Paul and Elder 87-116). Barnett notes the difficulty in determining such a universality (Barnett 23-34), but we as the faculty of Huntingdon are in clear agreement that a basic sense of reason and logic is the necessary standard for critical thinking.

**V. The Philosophy of the PACT Colloquium:**

**V.i. Immediate Engagement**

In designing the first-year class, we realized that since our goal is to introduce students to the “different world” of higher education, we needed to find a way to make higher-level critical thinking accessible to our students. Therefore, this class will focus, essentially, on the basic tools of critical thinking as we, the Huntingdon faculty, have defined them.

On April 27th the QEP committee held a faculty focus group to generate ideas on how to approach the design of this class. It was very well attended, with more than two-thirds of the faculty involved. One of the main ideas that emerged was that, since our students are unaccustomed to engaging with ideas actively in the classroom, a main element of the
colloquium should be getting students to start thinking immediately. Students can think and argue—they do it every day. As one of the participants said, we just need to ask our students about movies, or their boyfriends, or the like, and we can see them make all sorts of arguments. We need to get them comfortable with bringing that sort of intellectual energy into the classroom, and then give them some tools to think and argue more effectively.

Our faculty’s approach is very similar to Gerald Graff’s in *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind*, where he declares that professors should “dare to be reductive,” which he calls “one of [his] maxims for academics” (11). Graff argues that we need to meet our students where they already are, to engage them as thinkers immediately to stimulate them as active members of our intellectual community. It is not that “being reductive” is about “dummying it down;” our students are perfectly able to argue, as Graff says, “when [they are] in a real conversation that requires [them] to be persuasive”(155). We need to start there, to (within reason) “tap… into students’ youthful argument cultures, which are not as far removed as they look from public forms of argument” (155). PACT intends to use this as a starting point, and engage with issues and controversies about which students can care immediately.

It is also important for us to recognize that our students do not need to gain a body of knowledge before they can think and argue; in fact, this class is all about teaching students to engage actively with ideas so they will be better equipped to gain knowledge in their later classes. Derek Bok, in *Our Underachieving Colleges*, argues that the best teachers of critical thinking “begin not by deciding what material they ought to cover but by concentrating on what it is they want their students to learn…They devote much thought to how to awaken their students’ curiosity and make them want to learn” (119). This skills-based rather than knowledge-based approach is important because once students enter into different academic disciplines and confront the “higher-order concepts,” these skills are integral to the construction of knowledge, helping students to “build new mental models of reality” (Bain 27) as they move forward in their educational experiences.

### V.ii. Disciplined Reading and Writing

Integral to building these critical thinking skills is helping students move away from their “youthful argument culture” into a more systematic and sophisticated world of intellectual engagement. Students need to be encouraged to think for themselves—but this does not mean that whatever they think is good. They need to be challenged “to develop habits of critical thinking and respect for the power of careful reasoning and analysis” (Bok 119). Students need to be able to challenge their own assumptions and engage thoughtfully with the thinking of others.

Because students need to engage the thinking of others to hone their critical thinking skills, Huntingdon’s QEP seeks to develop their ability to read closely, to be able to summarize, analyze, and evaluate the written arguments of others, so they gain a rational, objective, and fair-minded perspective on the world of ideas. This focus on engaging with texts emerges from one of the key things we learned from the FYEx class, which was not to spread ourselves too thin in terms of the skills developed in the class. The FYEx class tried to cover both written and oral
communication, as well as study skills and computer skills. And while the QEP Working Committee discussed the possibility of having public speaking/oral communication component in the PACT, we decided that the colloquium will focus on reading, writing, and classroom discussion. Since Communication 233, which teaches formal public speaking, may well be returning to the core within the next two years, we feel that such a focus on writing is warranted.

The awakening of students’ curiosity and the disciplining of that curiosity by close critical reading is the foundation on which we will build the primary task of this class--helping students organize their own thinking and communicate their original ideas clearly to an audience. This class will, therefore, focus on what Paul and Elder call “substantive writing,” as students take their thinking and reading skills, and use them to build their own arguments about a subject.

This focus on writing makes sense, since traditionally college-level introduction to critical thinking has been the purview of English composition classes. And this class is philosophically kin to Writing Across the Curriculum or Writing in the Disciplines classes (Anson, Bean, Russell, Carroll, McDonald and Peck) with a focus on “substantial writing,” or as Paul and Elder define it “the art of saying something worth saying about something worth saying something about.” (Paul and Elder “How to Write” 5). This is the process of building well-thought-out and supported arguments in response to a significant controversy, based on an engagement with the writing of others. This focus on argumentation, rather than on writing (as Paul and Elder say) “with an emphasis on style, variety of sentence structure, and rhetorical principles”(5) will keep the class focused on the fundamentals of critical thinking. This emphasis on writing will also allow the PACT colloquium to take the place of the introductory composition class, allowing other writing skills, like style, elegance, and research skills, to be addressed in the advanced composition class (see VII.i. Curriculum).

Previous first-year classes at Huntingdon, the LAS and FYEx, underemphasized this skill-development element of learning. This class will have such active learning skills at its heart. In essence, the PACT Colloquium will follow Graff’s injunction about the development of first-year courses:

The spread of college ‘first year experience’ courses and ‘freshman success seminars’ is a step in the right direction, but such courses generally stop short of providing intellectual socialization. They need to go beyond teaching study skills, time-management, using computers, and test-taking to give students more help in entering the academic culture of arguments and ideas (12).

Our PACT course shall take the interdisciplinary nature of a first-year seminar and combine it with the intellectual focus of a Writing in the Disciplines class, to create the sort of “intellectual socialization,” the introduction to the life of the mind that Graff--and our faculty--envision.

\textit{V.iii. Active Teaching}

The teaching of critical thinking is inseparable from active teaching; it is impossible to teach students to be thinkers without having them be active learners. Therefore, the PACT colloquium
and its faculty professional development will be dedicated to inculcating active teaching and
learning. Ever since Barr and Tagg’s seminal article in 1995, there has been a seismic shift in the
way scholars of education have viewed teaching: from imparting knowledge to developing skills,
from accumulation of facts to transforming the way students conceive and manipulate ideas,
from teacher-focused to student-focused, from passive learning to active learning. Unfortunately,
many of those on the front lines of academia remain either unaware or unaffected by this seismic
shift, feeling only vague aftershocks, primarily by way of the emphasis on student learning
outcomes in assessment.

A primary goal of Huntingdon’s QEP is to work towards a fundamental shift in the way both
students and teachers approach learning. Learning is a skill that, ironically, must be learned, and
unfortunately, students have been conditioned to be ineffective learners. Many, if not most, have
trained in what has been described (quite colorfully) as “bulimic education” (Robert de
Beaugrande, qtd. in Bain 41). Students take in as much information as they can ingest and then
disgorge it on the test, retaining little and gaining no nutritional intellectual value from what they
have “learned.” We, the Huntingdon faculty, have found many of our students to be what Tim
Clydesdale describes as a

…rather odd kind of student—one who appears polite and dutiful but who cares little
about the course work, the larger questions it raises, or the value of living an
examined life. Polite, dutiful, and disengaged students deserve neither blame nor
scorn. They have become exactly what one would expect of those born during the
information age and reared in America’s profoundly pragmatic culture” (Clydesdale
B8)

The opposite of this sort of “polite, dutiful and disengaged” learner is what the AAC&U’s
Greater Expectations calls the “empowered, informed, and responsible” learner. The
characteristics of such empowered student learners that are particularly pertinent to our ACT
plan are found in this Greater Expectations document. These learners should be able to:

- understand and employ quantitative and qualitative analysis to solve problems
- interpret and evaluate information from a variety of sources
- understand and work within complex systems and with diverse groups
- demonstrate intellectual agility and the ability to manage change
- transform information into knowledge and knowledge into judgment and action
  (Greater Expectations xi).

Another way of saying this is that an empowered learner is a critical thinker, not simply a
receptacle for information. Paul Ramsden has stated that “learning should be seen as a qualitative
change in a person’s way of seeing, experiencing, understanding, conceptualizing something in
the real world—rather than as a quantitative change in the amount of knowledge someone
possesses” (qtd. in Weimer 11).

But moving our students from being polite, dutiful and disengaged learners to become
empowered critical thinkers will not be easy; since most college professors still rely on the
traditional lecture as the primary pedagogical tool, passive learning is often reinforced even after
Huntingdon College

students get to college (Thielens 1987). This is despite the fact that for nearly forty years, the vast majority of research indicates that students retain very little of what they hear in lectures, neither in the short-term nor long-term. Students’ attention decreases dramatically after the first 15-20 minutes, according to studies by Penner (1984) and Verner & Dickinson (1967). Furthermore, Donald Bligh notes that while lectures can be an effective pedagogical tool, most students retain as little as 10% of the information conveyed in a lecture after one year (Bligh 2000). As Chickering and Gamson observe:

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves (3-7).

While lecturing, especially interactive lecturing, is a valuable tool in the pedagogical arsenal, it should not be the only tool since consistent traditional lecturing promotes passive learning. To help produce empowered critical thinkers, the PACT colloquium will be focused on active learning. As Pascarella and Terenzini observe, “the evidence unequivocally indicates that greater content learning and cognitive development occur in classrooms where students are engaged in and by the instructional and learning process” (651).

Active learning has been variously defined. Joe Cuseo says that active learning is “an investment of a significant amount of mental energy and a high level of psychological involvement in the learning process” (1). The Stanford University Center for Teaching and Learning observes that “active learning is simply that—having students engage in some activity that forces them to think about and comment on the information presented” (“Active Learning” 1).

However it is defined, we agree with Bonwell and Eison that there are common characteristics associated with active learning in all its manifestations.

- Students are involved in more than listening.
- Less emphasis is placed on transmitting information and more on developing students’ skills.
- Students are involved in higher-order thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation).
- Students are engaged in activities (e.g. reading, discussion, writing).
- Greater emphasis is placed on students’ exploration of their own attitudes and values (Bonwell and Eison).

Over the next year, as we finalize the design of the colloquium and build our faculty development, we will be developing the first-year PACT course so that it models each of these characteristics. Toward this end, there will be significant investment of time and resources in training faculty in active learning techniques. Twenty years of research indicates that “classroom activities that require student participation—question-and-answer exchanges, topical discussions, assignments that call upon higher-order thinking, problem-solving activities...appear to promote course involvement” (Pascarella and Terenzini 651). Case studies, class discussion, debates, role-playing, in-class writing assignments, oral presentations, and group work are just a few of
the many techniques used to promote active learning. And ultimately critical thinking and active learning are integrally interwoven. Critical thinking requires active learning and active learning facilitates critical thinking.

V.iv. Adapting and Implementing the Paul-Elder Model of Critical Thinking

While the Huntingdon faculty has developed a very useful definition of critical thinking, we do not want our institution to be acting in a vacuum. It is beneficial to have our PACT program connected to a broadly understood and accepted philosophical model for critical thinking that fits our own definition. And there are many critical thinking frameworks we could adopt to structure our class—many of them line-up with our faculty’s definition of critical thinking. David Moseley et al, in their Frameworks for Thinking, map out forty-two different frameworks for critical thinking, from Bloom’s Taxonomy, to Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, to Ausubel and Robinson’s six hierarchically ordered categories of thinking. At this point, the committee has decided to adopt the Paul-Elder model of critical thinking as the underlying structuring principle of the PACT. The Paul/Elder framework for critical thinking has two primary advantages. First, Richard Paul and Lynda Elder are the founders and directors of the Institute for Critical Thinking, which is not only a leading voice in the critical thinking community, but is also a powerful resource for support in critical thinking activities. ICT produces useful texts that are both accessible and affordable, as well as standardized examinations and other assessment materials. The ICT website also offers pedagogical and faculty-development support. (http://www.criticalthinking.org) And the ICT also offers professional development support which, while not financially feasible this year, may in the future prove to be an excellent resource. Finally (and most importantly), the Institute offers useful networking with other institutions that have established critical thinking programs. The Paul/Elder framework has been adopted both by the University of Louisville and Eastern Kentucky University for their critical thinking QEPs, both of which have been influential on the development of our critical thinking program. Members of the Huntingdon College QEP Working Committee attended this summer’s Institute for Critical Thinking conference in Berkeley, and we have made contacts with the directors of the critical thinking programs at Louisville, as well as with other teachers of critical thinking at different institutions. We plan also to send many of our faculty who will be teaching in the PACT to Louisville’s Ideas to Action conference in the spring.

Of course, as we develop the design for our PACT program, we will be open to adjusting our theoretical approach. Paul/Elder, though, acts as a useful starting place.

From Paul and Elder, The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking

26
The Elements of Reasoning, and especially the Intellectual Standards, offer a very useful set of guiding principles for the PACT colloquium. They will help give our faculty a unified vocabulary that is flexible and inclusive enough to meet any intellectual task.

Our faculty’s definition of critical thinking embraces almost all of Paul and Elder’s elements; both approaches see critical thinking as a process where students engage in an open minded examination of a problem and generate their own responses to that problem. Both define critical thinking as building credible responses by applying the intellectual standards of fair-mindedness and logic to the issues and information involved, and assessing the assumptions and reasoning of others’ arguments. Critical thinkers then communicate their position on the issue rationally and clearly to other critical thinkers.

But for our students, the full nuance and complexity of the Paul-Elder model may be overwhelming. When confronted with eight Intellectual Standards and eight Elements of Reasoning, our students will likely respond by, at best, passive memorization (“which step is this one?”) or, at worst, complete intellectual shut-down.

Fortunately, the Paul/Elder model is not designed to be adopted in an all-or-nothing fashion—it is designed to be flexible, to allow a “cafeteria” approach, where each instructor in each different
discipline may pick-and-chose the elements and standards that are most important for her/his needs (Hale 2009). We will therefore distill and refine this complex system to a few key elements that we can communicate (via the PACT Colloquium) to our students. We will decide, as a faculty, what elements of reasoning and what standards we should focus on in the PACT colloquium. Based on our discussions from last spring, it is likely that “fairness” and “logical sufficiency” will be the Critical Thinking Standards on which we can agree. For the Elements of Thinking we will likely focus on critical thinking as answering questions or problems, and the essential nature of recognizing and questioning the assumptions behind any argument. These choices are, of course, subject to ongoing development during our 2009-10 workshops.

And, finally, we shall focus our class on the communication of ideas to an audience of critical thinkers who will assess arguments by the same critical standards.

And so while the broad goal of the ACT is to produce critical thinkers who can engage actively with significant issues across academic disciplines, we will start with a more focused definition of critical thinking for the PACT colloquium. Therefore, our core definition of critical thinking with which we will begin our course development will be: Critical thinking is a process by which students engage in an open-minded examination of a problem and generate their own responses to that problem. Critical thinkers build credible responses by applying intellectual standards such as fair-mindedness and logic to the issues involved and to their assessment of others’ arguments. They then are able to communicate their position on the issue rationally and clearly to an audience of fellow critical thinkers.

| Critical thinking is a process by which students engage in an open-minded examination of a problem and generate their own responses to that problem. Critical thinkers build credible responses by applying intellectual standards such as fair-mindedness and logic to the issues involved and to their assessment of others’ arguments. They then are able to communicate their position on the issue rationally and clearly to an audience of fellow critical thinkers. |

This is a long and complex definition, which we may “condense” for our students to: Our goal in the PACT Colloquium is to produce rational and fair-minded critical thinkers who can think actively, read closely, and write substantively about significant issues.

| Our goal in the PACT Colloquium is to produce rational and fair-minded critical thinkers who can think actively, read closely, and write substantively about significant issues. |

These are only working definitions, of course, subject to revision as we develop the PACT over the next year.

VI. The PACT Colloquium: Structure

There will be extensive faculty input into the course’s content, but there are currently some basic structural principles that will shape the content.
VI.i. Small Class Size

Small class size is vital for the active teaching and learning central to the colloquium—but it is also vital for faculty buy-in. Faculty feedback on the FYEx class showed large class size to be a significant problem. This class must be kept below 20 students for faculty/student engagement to be effective. This will require a change in the structure of the core curriculum (See VII.i. Curriculum).

VI.ii. Clear Focus

As we learned from the LAS experience, and even more so from the FYEx experience, in order to have effective faculty and student engagement we need to keep the class focused. The single, focused goal of teaching critical thinking and related writing skills (rather than the extensive high-culture knowledge of the LAS or the ambitious range of practical skills in FYEx) will keep the PACT Colloquium streamlined and efficient.

VI.iii. Units

Since the philosophy of this class is based in longstanding practices in Writing Across the Curriculum or Writing in the Disciplines Programs, we are structuring it like a WAC class. This structure involves the separation of the class into “units,” different thinking and writing tasks that focus on different disciplines. The class will begin with a general critical thinking unit that uses popular, non-academic controversies as an introduction to basic critical thinking tools; this will be followed by at least two different disciplinary units that address critical thinking from a specific discipline’s perspective.

VI.iv. Theme

There is widespread agreement that the class will be more unified if there is a general theme structuring the course, as a theme allows students to see the coherence between methods of thinking in different disciplines, as well as helping students maintain a high level of interest. With input from the faculty and student surveys, the committee considered multiple themes (“War,” “Sexuality,” “Environment,” “Power,” “Marriage” or “Drugs and Alcohol”) but settled on the theme of “violence” as the topic for the initial PACT colloquium. This theme should be broad enough to allow different disciplines to develop interesting units, but still be controversial enough to catch our students’ interest. We had considered several others, such as “War,” “The Environment,” “Religion,” and a particular student favorite, “Drugs and Alcohol.” These or other ideas may be used in later versions of this class.
VII. Fall 2010: Provisional Class Structure

VII.i. Fall 2010 Unit Design: Critical Thinking in Action

The class will consist of at least three units—a general critical thinking unit followed by two discipline-specific units. All classes will use the same introductory general critical thinking unit, but there may be choice about what two disciplinary units are used.

While we want these units to be creative, there also needs to be consistency among the units. So, we need a template to guide the design of each unit. We envision each unit as lasting 4-5 weeks and having four basic steps.

- **Part 1:** The unit will begin with a problem or question students can engage with immediately. We want students to be able to take a position and argue the very first day of the unit. This will involve mostly class discussion, with some informal, in-class writing.

- **Part 2:** Students will be introduced to some basic critical tools and/or questions to analyze and evaluate the arguments made in Part 1. And like Part 1, this will be mostly class discussion with informal writings.

- **Part 3:** Students will read, analyze, and evaluate short essays about the problem/question using the critical tools introduced in Part 2. This will include a short formal rhetorical analysis writing assignment.

- **Part 4:** Students will develop a rational, objective, written argument that supports their positions on the problem/question for an audience of fellow critical thinkers. This section will involve a longer formal writing assignment.

*Justification for Step 1:* We want students to be actively engaged in critical thinking, therefore we cannot be telling them what to think. We need to give the students a problem that is “real” to them, that is somehow relevant to the world they live in. They need to be able to start thinking about the problem immediately. But it *must* be something they have to “grapple” with—there should not be a clear “right” answer—there must be controversy. Of course, it is unlikely that the students’ positions will be strong, but they need to be able to bring something to the conversation without any preamble.

While there was significant disagreement in the faculty focus group discussion over the length of the units, there was general consensus that we need to help students “get comfortable with talking and expressing opinions.” This initial moment is the place for such acclimatization to thinking. Students, we agreed, need to be able to get their ideas out and get their minds working. They must be free to “get it wrong” at this stage in the process. It may not be good thinking, and that is alright; students need a place to start.

*Justification for Step 2:* The second step is to step back and begin analyzing and questioning what emerged from part one. Again, this was a main point that emerged from the faculty focus group. A potential basic question for this step is:


- “How can you persuade someone who doesn’t agree with you?”

Other possible questions are:
- What are the assumptions of your position? Of others’ positions?
- What’s the logic of your position? Of other’s positions?
- What evidence is needed to support your/other positions?
- How would you get that evidence so it’s credible?

This is the moment where students need to begin to confront “expectation failure.” This is a delicate moment, as we don’t want to crush their enthusiasm. But this is where they need to start self-critiquing, to begin the reflexive process of critical thinking.

There were significant differences in the focus group on what sorts of questions to ask, so the committee was not comfortable dictating the specifics of these critical tools. Developing these basic questions will be one of the first tasks in the fall faculty workshops—and the tools offered in the Paul/Elder framework for critical thinking (as well as the Gerald Graff and Gerald Nosich texts mentioned in the next section) will be of significant help.

**Justification for Step 3:** The third step is the “reading” or “research” portion of the process. The basic objective is that students see how others engage with the problem, come to understand those approaches, and begin to respond to those approaches—particularly to those with which they disagree. This is also the moment for developing evidence, either through secondary research or experimentation. This is where we develop student reading skills. The readings, as the focus group pointed out, should be short and focused.

**Justification for Step 4:** The fourth step is the writing portion of the class, where students return to their arguments, reinforced by the self-analysis of step 2 and the critical reading of step 3, and develop a written argument (in a form appropriate to the specific discipline) that aims to persuade an audience of skeptical critical thinkers.

**VII.ii. Fall 2010: Potential Texts for the PACT**

The specifics of the reading and writing assignments in the PACT colloquium will be determined as we develop the class over the next year.

We plan on designing our own self-published readers that will be topic and unit specific. We envision the unit topics as involving current and dynamic questions or problems with which our students can engage, and we want to keep readings reasonably accessible in length and style. We want to challenge our students, but be sure that the hurdles we establish are not too high for them to clear.

There are, though, several very useful options for supporting texts for the class which will be presented to the faculty as we develop the class over the fall.


**VII.iii. Fall 2010: Potential Supplemental General Text**


Paul and Elder, *Critical Thinking Competency Standards*

These short and inexpensive texts from Paul and Elder’s Foundation for Critical Thinking are very useful; they break down the basic elements of critical thinking into accessible elements, and are flexible enough for individual faculty members to develop their own approaches to teaching the PACT class.


Nosich’s book is clear and accessible to students; it is, essentially, a streamlined and student-friendly version of the Paul/Elder model. Nosich’s interdisciplinary approach is particularly useful for our interdisciplinary PACT program.

The Louisville Ideas to Action program has adopted Nosich’s text for their faculty development program, and has used the Paul/Elder “Miniature Guide” to great effect in a variety of teaching situations (Gagne, Jones, and Ross 2009).

**VII.iv. Fall 2010: Potential Reading and Writing Texts**

Paul and Elder: *How to Read a Paragraph: The Art of Close Reading*

Paul and Elder: *How to Write a Paragraph: The Art of Substantive Writing,*

Gerald Graff: *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*

Both the Paul and Elder texts and the Graff text are inexpensive options that very clearly delineate methods for close-reading the writing of others while giving very clear methods for writing; in fact, both give “templates” for building sentences and paragraphs.

These texts are all particularly useful in that they focus on writing as it engages in arguments—but on a very clear, introductory level. Nor do they emphasize style or mechanics. And they both address, in clear and accessible ways, some basic approaches to writing in different disciplines—a key issue for our interdisciplinary class. Thus these texts are excellent resources for non-specialist teachers to use for teaching writing.

It is possible that we could offer our faculty a choice in writing texts—though the supplemental text should be standard.
VIII. Institutional Capacity:

VIII.i. Curriculum

A significant question of Huntingdon’s institutional capacity to run a class like the PACT Colloquium is how it should be positioned in the core curriculum so that two key conditions are fulfilled: 1) each class must have fewer than 18 students in order to enable the necessary active learning pedagogy, 2) classes must be taught by faculty from across the college to encourage the transferability of critical thinking skills. Our experiences with FYEx and LAS have made the importance of these conditions abundantly clear.

To achieve these conditions, the PACT Colloquium must be given a central place in the core curriculum. It should not be treated as an “add-on” class taught as an overload, as first-year seminars are too often viewed. It needs to be integrated into the core curriculum teaching of all disciplines and into the teaching load of faculty. This will allow us to keep the classes small, and also demonstrate, for students and faculty alike, the importance of the class’ intellectual endeavor. It should be recognized as the base on which we will build our educational superstructure.

But it is not feasible simply to add a new class to our already considerable core curriculum. This would lead to impossibly large class sizes and significant staffing problems.

There is one place in the curriculum that is naturally suited for the integration of the PACT Colloquium—the English Composition sequence of ENGL 103 and 104; we think it would be most effective for the PACT Colloquium to become the first class in the English composition sequence.

At Huntingdon, as at many institutions, the English composition sequence has single-handedly taken on the task of teaching critical thinking. This has always run the risk of the “silo effect,” when students perceive such critical thinking skills as “something you just do in an English course,” and so limit transference of these skills to other disciplines.

The aim of PACT colloquium, therefore, is not to replace ENGL 103 but to enhance its effect by taking the excellent practices of ENGL 103 and circulating them through the rest of the college. The goals of the PACT Colloquium are the same as those of ENGL 103 or any good first-year composition class (in fact, the colloquium is modeled on an English Writing Across the Curriculum composition class); both the PACT colloquium and an English composition class ask students to develop their higher-level critical thinking and then communicate that thinking to an audience.

VIII.ii. Funding

With the elimination of the FYEX and replacement of ENG 103 with the PACT colloquium Huntingdon should have the financial capacity to staff the PACT course.
Since Huntingdon College has limited financial resources, we have made an intentional decision not to build a QEP budget upon yet-to-be secured funds. Since there is no guarantee that such funding will emerge, if we want a QEP that will be fiscally feasible for a long period of time, we need to design a plan that will employ existing funds, well beyond any “start-up” funds that might become available.

For this reason, Huntingdon has decided to reallocate existing monies for a majority of QEP funding. The elimination of FYEX 103 and ENG 103 will allow Huntingdon to staff the PACT first-year colloquium at no additional net cost. The fact that Huntingdon has essentially a four-course writing sequence, including ENG 103 and 104 along with two additional writing intensive Literature courses, and that the PACT first-year course will have a significant writing component, has led us to believe that the elimination of ENG 103 will not adversely affect the attainment of college-level writing for our students. In fact, the integration of critical thinking skills and techniques in courses across the core will possibly lead to additional emphasis on writing that demonstrates the development of critical thinking skills in the discipline, as opposed to exams which focus primarily on content acquisition. We do recognize the need to monitor student writing abilities to ensure that the elimination of ENGL 103 will not adversely affect our students’ writing ability, and new measures are being developed to assess the writing abilities of Huntingdon graduates.

Huntingdon has committed significant professional development funds to the project. Most of these funds come from an existing professional development account that has been underutilized over the past several years. And since Huntingdon College has no publication/performance requirement for promotion and tenure, professional development funds are already focused on pedagogical development. Therefore, the earmarking of a portion of the existing professional development budget for training faculty in active learning and critical thinking practices will not cause undue burden.

And finally, the QEP director is a current faculty member in the Department of Language and Literature who will be given half-time course release to run the QEP. This course release will be absorbed by the elimination of ENGL 103.

**IX. The Next Step of the ACT, Part 1: Integrating Critical Thinking Across the Core**

Once the PACT colloquium has begun, we will proceed to expand our critical thinking project through the core curriculum. It is essential that the colloquium not exist in a vacuum; if students only encounter intentional critical thinking in their first-year class, that class will suffer from the “silo effect.” If critical thinking is truly fundamental to our various disciplines, then it should also be taught in our core classes.

Having integrated disciplinary contributions to the first-year colloquium, maintaining a focus on critical thought, we also expect to work in the other direction. That is, there should be feedback from that exercise to the core curriculum. Those skills that are introduced in the PACT colloquium shall be reinforced in core classes, *in a disciplinary context.* This will necessitate the
adjustment of some of our core classes, but, examining the core learning outcomes developed by the departments, we find that critical thinking is something that nearly all disciplines value highly. That being the case, Huntingdon’s QEP will integrate critical thinking in more intentional and systematic manner into many of our core classes, beginning with a few pilot courses in 2010/2012. To maintain consistency and quality, the QEP steering committee will develop standardized pedagogical practices, assignments, and rubrics for assessment.

The integration of active teaching strategies, the development of standardized assignments, and the construction of rubrics will all be part of our faculty development plan for the extension of critical thinking across the core.

X. The Next Step of the ACT, Part 2: Culminating Experiences

Establishing a first-year critical thinking colloquium and distributing critical thinking expectations across the core only addresses the first few years of our students’ college experience. We want critical thinking to encompass the entirety of our students’ education.

So, within the next five years Huntingdon will establish a uniform set of standards for each discipline to ensure that each student will have a culminating experience (an upper-level class, a senior seminar, a capstone project, etc.) that challenges the student to perform critical thinking at a significantly advanced level.

This plan will unify the students’ experience at Huntingdon by encouraging the development of their thinking as an organic process, from the initial stages of the PACT colloquium to the higher-level thinking skills they will use in their upper-level classes. Critical thinking is not a static process—it is not a skill that is acquired and then simply maintained. One should be constantly developing as a thinker, moving from the very self-conscious early stages (the PACT colloquium) to more advanced stages where students can develop “significant insight into problems at deeper levels of thought” (Paul and Elder 439). Throughout their college experience students will be expected to develop and progress as critical thinkers, and be able to think at a high level by their senior year. We do not, of course, expect four years of college to produce mastery of thinking, “where [they] intuitively are doing what took deliberate effort at the practicing and advanced stages” (443). But we do expect that students should be advanced thinkers, prepared to move on to graduate school or into the workforce as empowered, thoughtful, and engaged individuals.

Designing requirements for a culminating experience will have two useful institutional effects. First, it will help maintain consistency in critical thinking expectations within the majors while allowing the faculty within the discipline to maintain control over how they teach in their fields. Bracketing the major classes with the core curriculum and the culminating experience gives a useful structural outline without intrusive micromanagement. Second, it gives a concrete direct assessment measure of the effectiveness of our critical thinking program, and of the college as a whole (Catchings) (see “Assessment” below).
In order to smoothly integrate this culminating experience into the curriculum while assuring that these experiences are appropriate to their specific disciplines, departments do not need to design a new class to fit this plan. Nor will departments need to establish a new independent study or senior thesis.

The implementation of this plan could take several forms—given the delicacy of developing standards across disciplines, we have given ourselves five years before we expect these culminating experiences to be implemented. The first goal will be to generate a rubric that delineates the expectations for critical thinking in any culminating experience class or project.

One possibility for developing the actual culminating experience class is that each department will designate an extant class at the junior/senior level (300-400 level classes, Capstones, Senior Projects, etc.) that will be adjusted to fulfill the expectations of the culminating experience rubric. Since Huntingdon has historically had a universal capstone requirement, many programs already have a clear structure in place.

There are other structural approaches that may be of interest to the faculty. It may be possible to design a system where upper-level classes that have been designated as critical-thinking culminating experiences may be taken by students outside of that particular major. There may also be interest in creating interdisciplinary classes that are specifically designed as culminating experiences, open to students in any major. These options could be useful for students in majors, particularly the performance-based majors like music, which may have difficulty conforming to the college-wide standardization of critical thinking.

Whatever the structure, it will be necessary for students to be required, within five years, to take a designated critical thinking culminating experience class or project in order to graduate. That class may be in that student’s major, or it may not be. These elements of the plan will be developed by the faculty over the next few years. Such a long development arc is necessary to gain the vital faculty buy-in. Each discipline’s faculty must feel they have ownership over the development of their own culminating experience.

**XI. Assessment Plan for the ACT, Part 1: Assessing the PACT Colloquium**

As the primary focus of the ACT is the first-year PACT colloquium, our initial assessment plan will focus on student learning outcomes for the colloquium. Our learning outcomes will focus on our chosen three elements of critical thinking as we define it—thinking, reading, and writing: first, students should be active critical thinkers, engaging as participants in classroom discussion. Second, they should be able to close-read short written arguments critically, summarizing, analyzing, and evaluating fairly and clearly. Third, they should be able to write substantively, to build rational arguments in support of their own positions.

This plan is developed in line with Barbara Walvoord’s *Assessment Clear and Simple* (Walvoord 2004)
XI.i. Oversight of Assessment, Resources and Structures

The QEP Director and the QEP Steering Committee will have direct oversight of the assessment of the PACT Colloquium.

The committee will be responsible for direct assessment measures of the PACT. The committee will gather and evaluate representative samples of student work, considering them in relation to the standardized rubric, and then reporting their findings to the faculty. The committee will also be responsible for responding to the findings of the assessment and working toward improving student learning with the appropriate changes in course design and faculty development.

The QEP Committee will be part of the Institutional Effectiveness Plan, on the model of other programs in the college. The Institutional Effectiveness Committee will provide NSSE and IDEA data that can be used for indirect assessment of the PACT colloquium and the ACT program as a whole—for example, the IDEA forms can usefully assess the colloquium, while NSSE data can assess the ACT program as a whole.

We are also considering adopting a national critical thinking test to generate more direct evidence of our students’ critical thinking skills. There are several options; the Foundation for Critical Thinking is in the process of developing such a test, while the Watson-Glaser test is already active and well-respected. This element of assessment, though, is several years down the line.

We need to keep expectations of our students’ performance reasonable. We are dealing with a student body generally unfamiliar with active learning and critical thinking, as we describe it. We will calibrate our rubrics to recognize this.

XI.i.1. Student Learning Outcomes for the PACT Colloquium

We need to establish clear learning outcomes and define what we expect students to achieve, both in class as active learners and in their writing as critical thinkers. These basic learning outcomes will be the foundation for the “second stage” of the ACT, the skills that will be highlighted across the core and in the culminating experiences of the majors. As we develop the colloquium with the faculty in the fall of 2009 and as the colloquium progresses after its initial run in 2010, these outcomes may be revised; but these basic three elements will be our starting point for the fall of 2009.

In the broadest sense, our primary student learning outcome for the PACT colloquium is that students become better thinkers. Students should be able to think critically and clearly in their engagement with significant issues. To demonstrate their abilities as critical thinkers, students will be able to engage in productive classroom discussions, engage in close, careful, and fair reading of the ideas and arguments of others, and cogently express their own ideas in writing. These three learning outcomes are further specified below:
PACT Student Learning Outcomes. Students should:

1) Demonstrate critical thinking skills by being active learners in class discussions. Students should:
   a. Be intellectually present and focused at the task at hand.
   b. Be actively and thoughtfully engaged with the controversial problems.
   c. Show an understanding of the qualities of vigorous but respectful and fair-minded civil discourse.
   d. Be able to engage constructively with the ideas of other students and the instructor.

2) Be able to engage in close, critical reading of short written arguments. Students should be able, both in class discussion and in short written essays, to:
   a. Summarize an author’s argument fairly and objectively.
   b. Analyze an author’s argument. Students should show a basic understanding of logic and argumentation.
   c. Evaluate an author’s argument, including assessing the context of arguments, what are reasonable and unreasonable assumptions, and some basic elements of logic.

3) Be able to cogently express their own ideas in a written argument, which should:
   a. Have a clear and concise position to be defended.
   b. Use appropriate evidence to support their claim.
   c. Respond constructively to the arguments of others.
   d. Have a clear and coherent organization.
   e. Use a tone appropriate to addressing an audience of fellow critical thinkers
   f. Use appropriate standard written English.

In essence, we envision critical thinking as tripartite, consisting of 1) active engagement in classroom discussion, 2) reading, and 3) writing.

We must keep our plan simple and functional—we will focus as much as possible on direct measures for the assessment of the class. There will be three elements of our assessment, all based on faculty-developed standardized rubrics; first, a pre- and post-test on critical thinking; second, assessment of classroom performance; third, assessment of students’ written work. All three elements will be assessed by faculty-developed rubrics.

**XI.i.2. Three Direct Measures for PACT Colloquium Assessment**

This relatively simple assessment tools were chosen because 1) as this is the initial run of the class, we wanted to keep the assessment straightforward, and 2) the premise of this class is the standardization and transferability of critical thinking in the college—therefore it is essentail to the larger goals of the QEP that assignments and grading rubrics be standardized. Thus direct assessment is a natural choice. Of course, as the course moves forward, these plans will be subject to revision.

**Weekly meetings:** Weekly meetings of the PACT Colloquium faculty, led by the PACT director, will allow our assessment of these different elements of the class to be quickly available to the teaching faculty.
XI.i.2.a. Pre-test and Post-test

**Pre-Test:** In the first week of class we will administer a short, standardized critical thinking exam that will assess the students’ initial skills at thinking and writing. This test will be developed from the Paul and Elder tools for assessing critical thinking. The Foundation for Critical Thinking is developing a multiple choice analytical reasoning test which we may be interested in piloting in this class. It is unlikely that we would want to use a fully qualitative test as the pre-test, as assessment would be too difficult.

**Post-Test:** The last week of the colloquium will be a review in preparation for the final exam. Since this class will emphasize the expression of critical thinking in writing, the exam will be essentially a qualitative in-class essay, based on *The Critical Thinking Reading and Writing Test* (Paul and Elder 2006). These exams will be graded by the instructor based on a standardized rubric. Our primary adjustment to the Paul and Elder test is to design a test prompt that is in line with the theme of the colloquium. There will also be a multiple-choice element to parallel the pre-test.

A representative sample of post-exam essays from each class will be assessed annually, based on the universal rubric, by the QEP committee.

**How Data will be Used for Improvement of Learning**

**The Pre-Test:** This should establish a baseline of our students’ critical thinking skills at the outset of their Huntingdon education. This information can be used to recalibrate the expectation level of our faculty, and of our grading rubrics. It is possible that this information may be useful as early as the first few weeks of the semester.

The assessment of this test will help us with designing each year’s class, by giving us a much clearer sense of our initial expectations of our students’ skill level.

These data will also give us a useful baseline for assessing the ACT program throughout the core classes and the culminating experience.

**The Post-Test:** The pedagogical goal of the post-test is to give the students a unifying task at the end of the class to “wrap up” the skills of the semester. We should be able to see what elements of critical thinking (thinking, reading, and writing) are weakest, and address our development of the course (and faculty development) accordingly. But this test should also assess whether this class produces any improvement in thinking and communication skills beyond what the students came in with.
Changes to Improve Assessment Mechanisms

As this is the first run of this class, it is possible that such a double-testing procedure will be unnecessarily redundant. The QEP Committee will evaluate the usefulness of this procedure after the first year.

The content of the tests, as well as their format, will be evaluated each year, just as the class will be evaluated.

XI.i.2.b. Classroom Performance Assessment

Classroom performance assessment is difficult to execute, but there is extensive scholarship to aid in the development of our testing tools (Brualdi, Hibbard, Popham, Stiggins).

It is important that we have a mechanism in place to assess how students are engaging as active critical thinkers in the classroom; it’s the first step in our discussion/reading/writing process, and we need to know how we can improve our students’ engagement in class.

It is important that we not limit the assessment of our student’s critical thinking skills to writing alone. Therefore, in our first year running this class, we will have instructors assess each student’s performance in classroom discussions. We will have this done at least twice, first during week 3 and then in week 11. This will be based on a relatively simple rating scale of 4-5 qualities that will be determined by a rubric based on our active learning expectations.

We will generate a rubric with the faculty in workshops (see “Rubric Design” below)

The main criteria will stress not simply talking in class, but the student’s ability to engage in fair, civil, but rigorous discourse about the ideas of others, to assess logic, and to generate original responses to ideas. Essentially, we want to assess how students work in class to engage in our three critical thinking steps: engaging with their peers, analyzing other’s arguments fairly, and crafting their own arguments.

This will not only give us a sense of developing student engagement, but help us develop our active teaching strategies to increase student learning.

It will be made clear to the faculty that this is not an evaluation of the teacher, but of the students.

These data will give faculty a quantifiable method for evaluating student’s in-class performance for grading purposes as well, which will be standardized in the PACT colloquium, and thus help avoid the perception (as in LAS and FYEx) of inequitable grading.
How Data will be Used for Improvement of Learning

The QEP Committee will compile the data from the faculty’s ratings and assess what qualities of student engagement seem to be successful, and which seem to be lagging, and work on the necessary faculty development to encourage appropriate active teaching strategies.

Changes to Improve Assessment Mechanisms

This is the most experimental of our assessment measures, and will assuredly call for the most revision as we develop our assessment strategies. This highly subjective faculty-based assessment may not give good, verifiable data. We will examine the possibility of having faculty observe each other’s students, or having students perform peer evaluations.

The QEP Committee will assess the functionality of this system after the first year.

Xl.i.2.c. Writing Assessment

This will form the bulk of our direct assessment, and the place where we can most directly address problems in first-year classes at Huntingdon.

There was significant anxiety in both FYEx and LAS about the grading of student writing. The students often felt the grading to be arbitrary and inconsistent, while faculty who were unfamiliar with grading essays often felt insecure about assigning grades. It is thus important to establish clear, faculty-generated rubrics that guide the grading of student writing. This will be a central topic in the fall 2009 faculty workshops.

Our assessment will focus on the two main papers in each unit—the rhetorical analysis paper, which assess students’ skills at reading (fairly summarizing, analyzing, and evaluating the writing of others), and the argument essay, which assesses the primary skill of the PACT, building one’s own rational arguments in substantive writing.

The QEP committee will gather and assess a representative sample of each assignment. There should be three analysis essays and three argument essays.

How Data will be Used for Improvement of Learning

Use of Turnitin.com will make the gathering of essays relatively easy, and so the committee may be able to have a “rolling assessment” during the semester, and give feedback to the faculty in a timely manner.

The committee will assess these essays based on the standardized rubric. The committee will take into account the hoped-for progress as the semester moves along.
Differentiating between the two assignments (analysis and argument) will give useful information as to 1) what elements of the PACT need to be developed, and 2) how those elements could be more effectively connected.

Students should be good at both analysis and building their own arguments—and those skills should be connected. But too often they are seen as separate, and it’s possible (even likely) that this class will be rather more successful at teaching one skill than the other. We want students to have effectively integrated their reading and arguing skills.

The committee will assess what significant student learning issues emerge from their readings of these essays, and design appropriate class revisions and faculty development to address the issue.

Moreover, assessing student writing (particularly as it progresses through the semester) will illuminate what technical elements of writing need to be addressed most urgently.

This question of “non-substantive” writing issues (SWE, stylistic issues, etc.) should be addressed, when possible, in the PACT colloquium. But such issues would be best addressed in coordination with the English department and the Writing Center; the QEP director and committee will work closely with the English composition program and the Writing Center director to coordinate the appropriate responses to develop non-substantive writing.

Changes to Improve Assessment Mechanisms

Assessing six essays a semester may not be feasible; we will try it the first time around, but we may find it best to assess the first unit essays and then the last. It is likely, as we develop this plan, that the analysis essay will need to be adjusted to be more logistically feasible.

Xl.ii. Rubric Design

We shall need rubrics based on our learning outcomes to standardize the grading and assessment of the pre- and post-test, classroom performance, and the unit writing projects. In our fall 2009 workshops, the faculty shall design rubrics for the pre- and post-test, classroom performance, and each set of unit assignments.

Before the colloquium begins, we will socialize the faculty to the unit rubrics using student essays from this fall’s ENGL 103. The collection of student essays is facilitated by the English Department’s use of Turnitin.com. This will also establish a benchmark, not just for the grading of next fall’s colloquium essays, but for assessing any changes in our students’ active learning and critical thinking skills.

While these ENGL 103 essays will not be used to norm assignment-specific rubrics, they will be used in the fall 2010 workshops, the faculty teaching the class will socialize their grading expectations, again using ENGL 103 essays.
Rubric creation is the central pillar of our assessment plan for the colloquium; we need clear and uniform learning outcomes in order to design effective units for the class. Therefore we plan to have clear rubrics established for all three parts of the assessment plan in-place by mid-term, fall 2009.

**XII. Assessing the Next Steps of the ACT:**

While the primary element of our QEP is the PACT Colloquium, the ACT’s long-term goals extend beyond a single class. We need to prepare to assess these larger goals as they develop.

**XII.i. Assessing Critical Thinking Across the Core**

As the PACT program extends into the core curriculum, and as the culminating experience is initiated, the committee will also be responsible for direct assessment measures of those elements of the program.

This will emerge from the standardization of our rubrics in the colloquium.

Initially the faculty who volunteer to pilot the expansion of critical thinking throughout the core programs will be asked to adopt the rubrics for designing and grading written assignments, and (time permitting) the classroom performance assessment tools. The classroom assessment will be of particular use to classes that have a significant class participation grade.

As the three-year trajectory for the integration of standardized critical thinking skills through the core progresses, and the assessment and revision of the colloquium continues, these learning outcomes and rubrics will be developed and refined in order to make their distribution more effective.

**XII.ii. Assessing the Culminating Experience**

This will similarly involve the design and distribution of rubrics to guide the construction of cumulative experiences. In the three-year trajectory planned for the development of universal culminating experiences, standardized learning outcomes and a clear rubric will be developed. These outcomes and rubrics will be discipline specific, but will reflect the baseline critical thinking skills of the PACT colloquium.

Over the next two years the faculty will design a standardized rubric for these classes. This rubric must be broad enough to include all disciplines, yet clearly incorporate the critical thinking skills of active thinking, close reading, and substantive writing—at a significantly advanced level.
The QEP committee will review representative samples of student projects from these classes/projects based on the standardized rubric. The committee will compare the outcomes across the college and report these findings to all departments.

The assessment of these projects should be viewed on a 2-4 year arc, to determine if there is a progression in our students’ ability to function as high-level critical thinkers. We will also utilize a nationally-normed critical thinking test, such as the Watson-Glaser test, to assess our seniors’ acquisition of critical thinking skills.

Based on these outcomes, we will be able to adjust the first-year colloquium and the integration of critical thinking into the core curriculum to address any discerned weakness in our upper-level students’ skills. If we build a firm foundation of critical thinking, we should be able to produce such advanced thinkers. We want to build from the bottom up, and our response to assessment should focus on that base, not on upper-level classes.
### XIII. Assessment Plan Charts:

#### XIII.ii. Assessing the PACT Colloquium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal/Student Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Assessment data generated by:</th>
<th>Frequency of Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of critical thinking skills (general)</td>
<td>1. Pre-test and post-test &lt;br&gt;2. Indirect: Course evaluation forms</td>
<td>1. Random sample by QEP steering committee. &lt;br&gt;2. Associate Vice President for Institutional Assessment and Compliance (AVPIAC)</td>
<td>1. Each Semester &lt;br&gt;2. Each semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express critical thinking orally</td>
<td>1. Rubric for assessing class participation/expressions of ideas orally. &lt;br&gt;2. Indirect: Course evaluation forms</td>
<td>1. Faculty member &lt;br&gt;2. AVPIAC</td>
<td>1. Each Semester &lt;br&gt;2. Each semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read texts critically</td>
<td>1. Rhetorical Analysis Paper &lt;br&gt;2. Indirect: Course evaluation forms</td>
<td>1a. Faculty member &lt;br&gt;1b. Random sample by QEP steering committee. &lt;br&gt;2. AVPIAC</td>
<td>1. Each Semester &lt;br&gt;2. Each semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop own position based on critical thinking skills and techniques</td>
<td>1. Argumentative Paper &lt;br&gt;2. Indirect: Course evaluation forms</td>
<td>1a. Faculty member &lt;br&gt;1b. Random sample by QEP steering committee. &lt;br&gt;2. AVPIAC</td>
<td>1. Each Semester &lt;br&gt;2. Each semester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### XIII.ii. Assessing the Core and Culminating Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal/Student Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Assessment data generated by:</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of Critical Thinking Skills</td>
<td>1. Assignments in Core courses measured using Critical Thinking Rubric</td>
<td>1. Random sample by QEP steering committee.</td>
<td>1. Yearly after year three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Assignments in culminating experience measured using Critical Thinking Rubric</td>
<td>2. Random sample by QEP steering committee.</td>
<td>2. Every other year beginning in year five.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Nationally normed test administered to graduating seniors.</td>
<td>3. Associate Vice President for Institutional Assessment and Compliance.</td>
<td>3. Yearly, starting in year five. Baseline data collected starting in year two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indirect: NSSE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Engagement and Active Learning</td>
<td>Indirect: NSSE</td>
<td>Associate Vice President for Institutional Assessment and Compliance</td>
<td>Every 3-4 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
XIV. Implementation Plan for the QEP:

**XIV.i. QEP Organizational Structure**

Huntingdon College is a small institution. There are approximately eight hundred (800) students in the Traditional Program and approximately fifty-five (55) full-time faculty members. Given its small size, Huntingdon believes that a streamlined organizational structure for the implementation and oversight of the Quality Enhancement Plan will be appropriate and most effective.

There are four individuals or groups that will have oversight of ACT.

1. Vice President for Academic Affairs
2. QEP Director
3. QEP Steering Committee
4. Associate Vice President for Institutional Assessment and Compliance

**1. Vice President for Academic Affairs**

The Vice President for Academic Affairs serves on the QEP Steering Committee and is the primary liaison between the administration, the QEP Steering Committee, and QEP Director. He has ultimate responsibility for assuring the success of the QEP, establishing the budget for the QEP, assuring institutional capacity for implementation of the QEP, and integrating the QEP into the overall curriculum. In conjunction with the Director, he shall help establish professional development opportunities for the faculty in the areas of active learning and the teaching of critical thinking. Along with the Director, the VPAA writes and submits a yearly executive summary of the progress of the QEP to the Institutional Effectiveness Committee. The VPAA shall also have final responsibility for the submission of the five-year follow up report.
2. **QEP Director**

The QEP Director is a faculty member who is given 50% course load reduction and a summer stipend to direct the implementation and administration of the Quality Enhancement Plan. The Director is the primary contact and administrator for the QEP. The QEP Director reports directly to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. His duties include:

A. **PACT Colloquium**
   - Spearheading, in conjunction with the QEP Steering Committee, the development of the “common unit” of the PACT, including the choice of texts and readings.
   - Ushering PACT colloquium through curriculum committee, including submission of Curriculum Change forms to the Curriculum Committee.
   - Soliciting disciplinary units for the PACT and working with faculty on the development of these units.
   - Identification, in conjunction with the Steering Committee, of qualified faculty to teach in the PACT course.
   - Primary responsibility, in conjunction with the VPAA, for organizing the training of faculty to teach in the PACT course.
   - Coordinating and assuring consistency across sections of the PACT colloquium.
   - Meeting regularly with PACT faculty as a group to receive input and monitor progress.

B. **Integration of Critical Thinking into Core**
   - Development of guidelines for critical thinking intensive core courses (in conjunction with the Steering Committee).
   - Solicitation of appropriate courses for inclusion as critical thinking intensive core courses.
   - Training of participating faculty in the Paul/Elder model of critical thinking.

C. **Development of Critical Thinking Culminating Experiences**
   - Development of guidelines for critical thinking culminating experiences (in conjunction with the Steering Committee).

D. **Assessment**
   - In conjunction with Associate Vice President for Institutional Assessment and Compliance and Vice President for Academic Affairs, the QEP Director is responsible for assessment of all phases of the QEP.

E. **Administrative**
   - Chair of the QEP Steering Committee
   - Primary spokesperson and contact for QEP to internal and external constituencies
   - Oversight and control of QEP budget
   - Submission of yearly reports to VPAA and Institutional Effectiveness Committee on state of QEP
   - Creation and submission of 5-year Report
   - Assist with development and maintenance of ACT website
3. **QEP Steering Committee**

The QEP steering committee contains the following members:

i. QEP Director  
ii. Vice President for Academic Affairs  
iii. Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs  
iv. Associate Vice President for Institutional Assessment and Compliance  
v. Three faculty members  
vi. Two students  

The duties of the Committee include the following:

A. **PACT course**
   - The development of the “common unit” of the PACT, including the choice of texts and readings.  
   - Identification of qualified faculty to teach in the PACT course.  
   - Selection of faculty to teach in PACT colloquium.  
   - Selection/approval of disciplinary units in PACT colloquium.  
   - Selection of themes for PACT course following Year 1.  

B. **Integration of Critical Thinking into Core**
   - Development and final approval of guidelines for critical thinking core courses.  
   - Approval of course designs submitted as critical thinking intensive core courses.  
   - Assist departments if adjustments to departmental course rotations are required as a result of changes in the core.  

C. **Development of Critical Thinking Culminating Experiences**
   - Development and final approval of guidelines for critical thinking culminating experiences.  

D. **Assessment**
   - Assessment of PACT by reading random samples of papers and evaluating them on rubric.  
   - Evaluation of samples of writing from core critical thinking courses.  
   - Evaluation of nationally normed assessment measures.  

E. **Other**
   - Development of a plan for publicizing various elements of the QEP.  
   - Consultation on content of the website and other media.  
   - Evaluation of QEP Director.  

4. **Associate Vice President for Institutional Assessment and Compliance**

The Associate VP for Institutional Assessment and Compliance is a member of the QEP Steering Committee and shall work closely with the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the QEP Director on all matters related to the assessment of the ACT program. In particular, the Associate VP for Institutional Assessment and Compliance shall:

- Help select and administer any nationally normed assessment instruments.  
- Assist with the development of feasible and effective rubrics for assessing written work in the PACT, the core critical thinking courses, and the culminating experience.  
- Assist with the collection and interpretation of assessment data.
### XIV.ii. Budget

**A) Personnel: Salaries and Compensation**

1. **QEP Director**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY 09/10</th>
<th>FY 10/11</th>
<th>FY 11/12</th>
<th>FY 12/13</th>
<th>FY 13/14</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Director of QEP</td>
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<td>$24,000</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
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<td>QEP Director Summer Stipend</td>
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<td>Fringe Benefits</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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2. **Faculty for first-year PACT course**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY 09/10</th>
<th>FY 10/11</th>
<th>FY 11/12</th>
<th>FY 12/13</th>
<th>FY 13/14</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>5 Sections @ $2500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overload pay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjunct pay</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
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* Assumes that 10 sections will be taught in-load while 10 sections will require overload pay or hiring of adjuncts to cover courses taught by PACT faculty
### B) Assessment Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY 09/10</th>
<th>FY 10/11</th>
<th>FY 11/12</th>
<th>FY 12/13</th>
<th>FY 13/14</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty assessors of PACT writing and capstones</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Critical Thinking Skills Test</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$6,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### C) Professional Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY 09/10</th>
<th>FY 10/11</th>
<th>FY 11/12</th>
<th>FY 12/13</th>
<th>FY 13/14</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation for Critical Thinking Conference</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three participants per year @ $2,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Louisville Conference on Critical Thinking</td>
<td>$7,000</td>
<td>$7,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 participants @ $700</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop for teaching faculty how to assess critical thinking and writing (in house)</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-going faculty development on active learning, critical thinking</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$14,000</td>
<td>$16,000</td>
<td>$11,000</td>
<td>$11,000</td>
<td>$11,000</td>
<td>$63,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## D) Miscellaneous

Mini-grants for module development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Item</th>
<th>FY 09/10</th>
<th>FY 10/11</th>
<th>FY 11/12</th>
<th>FY 12/13</th>
<th>FY 13/14</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mini-grants for PACT module development</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$750</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$2,750</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplies for PACT Director, including marketing</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entertainment and book budget for PACT Director</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$1,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$1,750</td>
<td>$1,250</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$750</td>
<td>$750</td>
<td>$4,250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Item</th>
<th>FY 09/10</th>
<th>FY 10/11</th>
<th>FY 11/12</th>
<th>FY 12/13</th>
<th>FY 13/14</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QEP Director</td>
<td>$33,600</td>
<td>$34,900</td>
<td>$36,200</td>
<td>$37,500</td>
<td>$38,800</td>
<td>$181,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACT Course</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
<td>$6,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>$14,000</td>
<td>$16,000</td>
<td>$11,000</td>
<td>$11,000</td>
<td>$11,000</td>
<td>$63,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>$1,750</td>
<td>$1,250</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$750</td>
<td>$750</td>
<td>$5,500</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GRAND TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>$49,350</td>
<td>$78,750</td>
<td>$74,800</td>
<td>$75,850</td>
<td>$77,150</td>
<td>$355,900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Timeline

#### I. Overview of Five-Year Implementation Plan for QEP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>PACT Colloquium</th>
<th>Integration of Critical Thinking into the Core</th>
<th>Critical Thinking and Culminating Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1: 2009/2010</td>
<td>Development of First-year Colloquium (PACT 101)</td>
<td>Informal Piloting of Critical Thinking components in select core courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3: 2011/2012</td>
<td>First-Year Course</td>
<td>Core courses chosen by QEP Steering Committee as “Critical Thinking Intensive.” Additional core courses piloted.</td>
<td>Piloting of culminating experiences that integrate critical thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4: 2012/2013</td>
<td>First-Year Course</td>
<td>Implementation of requirement that all students are required to have a pre-determined number of core courses that integrate critical thinking skills</td>
<td>Implementation of additional culminating experiences that integrate critical thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5: 2013/2014</td>
<td>First-Year Course</td>
<td></td>
<td>All students required to have culminating experience that integrates critical thinking skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## II. First-Year Pact Colloquium Development 2009/2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>PACT Curriculum and Course Development</th>
<th>Faculty Training and development</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 2009</td>
<td>• September 18—In-service Friday: Faculty in-service event focused on development of units for PACT colloquium.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• QEP Working Committee disbands. • QEP Steering Committee formed. • Students, staff and faculty further informed about QEP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2009</td>
<td>Steering Committee finalizes common first unit: theme, primary source readings, textbook.</td>
<td>• October 16: In-service Friday Faculty work on common first unit of first-year colloquium</td>
<td>• Publicity events around QEP. • Examination of reintroduction of communication studies course due to elimination of FYEX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2009</td>
<td></td>
<td>• November 6: In-service Friday Training of Faculty in Active learning techniques and strategies.</td>
<td>English faculty meet to explore restructuring of ENG 103 and ENG 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2009</td>
<td>Proposals for PACT units due to Steering Committee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>Approval of units by Steering Committee</td>
<td>• January 29: In-service Friday Further training in critical thinking for faculty teaching in PACT.</td>
<td>Selection of faculty for 2010/2011 PACT colloquium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2010</td>
<td>Submission of PACT course to curriculum committee</td>
<td>• February 12: In-service Friday Familiarization with common first unit of PACT course.</td>
<td>Submission of Revised ENG 103/104 to curriculum committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2010</td>
<td>PACT steering committee works on course content and assessment measures, including rubrics for the grading/assessment of assignments.</td>
<td>• March 12: In-service Friday Training in disciplinary PACT units</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>University of Louisville Seminar on Critical Thinking. PACT faculty will attend.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>QEP Steering Committee meets to finalize PACT course and assessment measures.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Familiarization of entering students with PACT at new student orientation events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>Two day Faculty Workshop for PACT instructors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 2010</td>
<td>PACT course begun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
XV. Conclusion: The Past and Future of Huntingdon

On Wednesday, February 2nd, 1938, as the world sat on the verge of war, Dr. Hubert Searcy, the president-elect of Huntingdon College, spoke to the Montgomery Rotary Club. Dr. Searcy directly addressed the significance of higher education in a world darkened by the rise of authoritarianism and dogmatic fanaticism.

Formerly, the accepted rule of the college was to implant in the student’s mind that which was authoritatively asserted to be collegiate. Accumulatively down through modern times science has revealed to us into what a blind alley unexamined and unanalyzed claims of authority may lead us. Hence it has become indispensable that we revise our objectives so that a desirable rule of the college shall be to strive to develop in its students that sense of discrimination and that accuracy of judgment which shall enable them to discern what knowledge really is and how best it can be found. (“Dr. Searcy States Objectives” B6)

He declared that higher education’s “chief task is to help students use their minds, to learn to think, and if possible, to think for themselves,” and that “failing this, we are lost in the dust of the library.” (“Dr. Searcy States Objectives” B6)

Dr. Searcy’s words express the deep historical commitment Huntingdon has had to the development of free-thinking individuals, to helping shape students who can “think for themselves.” Huntingdon’s QEP seeks to build on that historical commitment by heeding the advice of our former President to shake the “dust of the library” from our feet, avoid the “blind alley” of the “unexamined…claims of authority,” and help our students, as our motto declares, to “grow in wisdom” and to “go forth to apply wisdom in service.”
XVI. Works Cited


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